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Elizabeth A. Golchert

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Concordia University–Portland

College of Education

Doctorate of Education Program

WE, THE UNDERSIGNED MEMBERS OF THE DISSERTATION COMMITTEE
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A Phenomenological Investigation of Early Childhood Education Preparation and Experiences of
California Certificated Elementary School Educators Assigned to Transitional Kindergarten
Programs

Elizabeth A. Golchert, Ed.D.
Concordia University–Portland
College of Education

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the College of Education
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education in
Educational Administration

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Concordia University–Portland

2019

Abstract

This dissertation represents original, independent research that is a contribution of new knowledge to the field of educational practice. As a new phenomenon in the California public school system, transitional kindergarten (TK) is now bringing about a closer look by researchers at legislative practices, TK program implementation, local school district policies, teacher preparation, and teacher implementation of best practices related to the education of children of approximately four years of age. The purpose of conducting this study was to broadly examine these topics, but more specifically, investigate the problem of children being assigned to teachers who do not have the knowledge and skills to implement developmentally appropriate practice (DAP). Methodologically, interviews with teachers currently assigned to TK classrooms in local education agencies (LEAs which are also referred to as “school districts”), provided numerous data sets regarding teacher preparation, institute of higher education (IHE) responsibilities, LEA policies and practices, teacher knowledge about DAP, evidence of implementation of both DAP and developmentally inappropriate practice (DIP), classroom environments, and other challenges. Results from this study indicate that many California children in TK classrooms are receiving instruction which is not developmentally appropriate. Ineffective or inappropriate teaching at any level can negatively impact academic and social-emotional growth. Closer examination of these potential implications could indicate the need for additional study, policy changes, and mitigation of adverse, albeit, unexpected consequences of TK legislation.

Keywords: Transitional kindergarten, early childhood education, developmentally appropriate practice (DAP), developmentally inappropriate practice (DIP), teacher preparation, professional development, professional learning, local education agencies, California Senate Bill 1381, California Senate Bill 876

Dedication

To Mom, Beth, Virginie, Cathy, Edith, Jay Bird, Wilbur, Uncle Walter, Aunt Barbara Jean, and little Alborz (Albie): thank you for keeping me grounded in what matters most. While this project mattered for but a moment, it is your presence in my life that has impacted me for eternity.

In thankfulness for the contributions of those who have already crossed the dissertation line with a focus on TK . . . I treasured and learned from your work. Let's make our studies matter for the children of California!

To all those who as children joined me somewhere on Life's path, and especially to Amanda, Alyssa, Kolin, and Kory; may the world become a better place because of your existence in it and may you always feel my heart's boundless and interminable love.

Acknowledgements

Firstly, I wish to acknowledge and thank the Concordia University–Portland, Oregon Ed.D. faculty who provided their time and wisdom to support the development of this project: Dr. Chad Becker, Dr. Jill Bonds, Dr. Jeanette Amayo, and Dr. Meg DuMez.

Secondly, I wish to acknowledge and thank the California Preschool Instructional Network (CPIN) administrative staff and the CPIN transitional kindergarten (TK) Leads for their continuous support over many years, their expertise in early childhood education, and their personal support of this project.

Thirdly, I wish to acknowledge and thank Cecelia Fisher-Dahms and my other Early Education and Care Division/Quality Improvement Office and other colleagues of the California Department of Education. Your support, patience, understanding, inquisitiveness, expertise, and confidence in my work is woven throughout these pages.

Lastly, I wish to acknowledge and thank the 23 amazing transitional kindergarten teacher participants from across the state of California who gave of their time, shared their stories, provided incredible insights, revealed their successes and challenges with sometimes brutal, sometimes touching, but always phenomenal honesty. Your voices matter!

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

At some point in most international societies, children enter a system of formal education (Merrell & Tymms, 2007). The knowledge and formal preparation of adults in these settings is reflected in the instructional strategies implemented, and in deliberate and intentional physical configurations of the learning environment (Broadbent, White, Mareschal, & Kirkham, 2018; Jechura, Wooldridge, Bertelsen, & Mayers, 2016). How local education agency (LEA) kindergarten-8th grade (K–8) educators understand and consider the developmental continuum needs of young children when presenting learning opportunities for transitional kindergarten (TK) children *may* reflect a disconnect of teacher preparation in the K–8 system.

Looking more closely at the emphasized word *may*, will take readers into two worlds: the world of early childhood education (ECE) which typically encompasses children birth to age eight and the world of K–8 LEAs which *typically* encompass children of approximately five years of age to 13 years of age. *May* and *typically* represent the complexity of early education in the United States and specifically in California. Children *may* enter TK (or may not), children *may* attend preschool (or may not), children *may* have successful outcomes in school (or may not), children *may* be taught by highly qualified teachers who understand their developmental needs (or may not). Children *typically* develop according to pre-determined milestones (or may not). Teachers *typically* understand child development theories (or may not). Teachers *typically* use developmentally appropriate practices (or may not). *Typically*, teachers will have the preparation and pedagogical understanding to provide young children with planned activities that further children's rapid development during the early years (or may not).

While considering the educational worlds of K–12 and early childhood education, this study addresses the need to understand a third world: the world of programs designed to educate children of approximately four years (or 48 months) of age in K–8 settings. In this study, TK is recognized as not fully an ECE phenomenon nor is it fully recognized as an LEA phenomenon. It is a world unto itself that was created by various, sometimes competing interests and entities (Fong, 2016; Henderson, 2016; Herota, 2014; Soria, 2016). Children of the approximate age of four years can *typically* balance on one foot. They can *typically* draw identifiable shapes, put on a coat, and focus on putting buttons through buttonholes. Children of the approximate age of four years *may* be able to follow rules, positively engage with other children, and speak in a way that others understand. Children of the approximate age of four years are *typically* able to learn letter names, numerals, and colors (Fuhs, Nesbitt, Farran & Dong, 2014; Iivonen, Saakslahti, & Nissinen, 2011; Li, Cao, Hu, Li, & Fuhong, 2017; Sasser, Bierman, Leinrichs, & Nix, 2017; Sprenger, 2013; Watson, 2014).

The study problem emphasizes the significant difference between “DAP” and “DIP.” These two acronyms, separated by one letter, represent the diversity of what may be happening in California TK classrooms. DAP, or developmentally *appropriate* practices, versus DIP, or developmentally *inappropriate* practices, is an educational imperative that must be understood by decision- and policy-making stakeholders, local administrators, and classroom educators (Alexander, 2014; Betawi & Jabbar 2018; Charlesworth & Deboer, 2000). *Inappropriate*, it is emphasized, does not mean that the strategies used are wrong. Inappropriate practices, as used in this study, may be suitable for some children yet unsuitable for children in the identified age group.

Background, Context, History, and Conceptual Framework for the Problem

The Kindergarten Readiness Act of 2010 (California Senate Bill 1381, Chapter 705) established TK as the first year of a 2-year kindergarten (K) program. Changing school entrance dates, Senator Simitian, the California legislature, and other early education stakeholders sought to address concerns related to increased academic demands on young children. At the time, approximately one-quarter of children in K were under the age of five (California State University (CSU) Center for the Advancement of Reading, 2011). The youngest children were expected to meet K standards by the end of the school year with comparable levels of proficiency as older classmates.

To safeguard and honor the unique needs and developmental stages of young children and to ensure increased future academic success (Karoly, Reardon, & Cho, 2007; Pimentel, 201), California's public school entrance dates were modified and phased in beginning in the 2011–2012 school year when age requirements mandated that children be five years of age on or before December 2 to enter kindergarten and six years of age to enter first grade. By 2012–2013, legislation required children to be five for kindergarten and six for first grade on or before November 1. By the 2013–2014 school year children entering kindergarten were required to be age five on or before September 1 and children entering first grade were required to be six years of age by the same date parameter (CSU Center for the Advancement of Reading, 2011).

Eligibility for TK also consisted of age requirements phased in over a three-year period. For the 2012–2013 school year, children whose birthdays fell on or between November 2 and December 2 were eligible for TK. In the 2013–2014 school year, children were eligible for transitional kindergarten if birthdates were between October 2 and December 2. Finally, beginning in the 2014–2015 school year and for school years thereafter, children born on or

between September 2 and December 2 became eligible for TK (CSU Center for the Advancement of Reading, 2011, Slide 14).

While enrollment of children in TK and K programs remained optional for parents, California elementary and unified school districts which offered K were required to provide TK as well beginning in the 2014–2015 school year. 36,000 instructional minutes, utilizing DAP, were required per year and instruction was to be provided by a teacher holding a California Multiple Subject Teaching Credential. “Job descriptions typically used for TK are the same as those used for kindergarten teachers, although prior experience in early childhood education is especially important in supporting the early learning experiences of younger children in a developmentally appropriate manner” (Early Edge California, n.d. p. 1).

TK educators, who teach the same-age children as preschool teachers, may have been overlooked in critical professional preparation components (Maniates, 2016). The problem of incomplete DAP training of TK teachers and resultant inadequacies in instructional approaches may result in multiple cohorts of children achieving less-than-desirable outcomes (Paolini, 2016; Silva, 2016; Speedie, 2016). Differing preparation expectations may have created a conundrum when moving children of approximately four years of age from a system requiring teachers to be competent in developmental practice into a system that did not immediately require teachers to be competent in similar aspects. Moving educators from the ECE system to the LEA system was problematic as many ECE teachers did not possess a bachelor’s degree as minimally required to teach in the TK/K–12 public school system (California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 2016).

While both a philosophical and educational problem, school districts could relatively quickly and effortlessly move teachers, teachers who had been vetted within the K–12 system,

into TK classrooms to meet requirements of Senate Bill 1381. California Senate Bill 837 / Section 46300 required “that a school district school shall ensure that credentialed teachers have, one of the following 24 units in Early Childhood Education (ECE) or Child Development (CD) or both, professional ECE experience comparable to 24 units and/or a child development permit” (p. 11). California’s Multiple Subject Teaching Credential was acceptable with the caveat that the teacher should have early childhood experience but did not *require* that TK teachers have early childhood experience and the associated preparation requirements.

Examination of multiple conceptual elements will be discussed in detail in forthcoming chapters and will include: Researcher Dispositions, Child Development Theories and Appropriate Practices, Early Childhood Education Research, Early Childhood Education Developmentally Appropriate Practice, California-Specific K–12 Teacher Preparation and Credentialing, Complexities of Early Childhood Education, and Comparisons Between Early Childhood Educator and K–12 Teacher Preparation.

ECE and K–8 public LEA systems traditionally function as autonomous silos from each other (Soria, 2016; Stover, 2013). Much of the autonomy may be attributable to federal and state, public and private funding sources and restrictions (Education Week, 2016; Hatfield, Lower, Cassidy, & Faldowski, 2015; Porter & Tau, 2014; PR Newswire, 2014, 2016). K–8 teachers are required to be knowledgeable in all content areas. “The Multiple Subject Teaching Credential authorizes the holder to teach *all subjects* [emphasis added] in a self-contained classroom, such as the classrooms in most elementary schools, in grades preschool, K–8, or in classes organized primarily for adults” (California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 2019, p. 1). While high school teachers generally have single subject certification, K–6 teachers and sometimes middle

school teachers, must not only have teaching skills at each grade level of the credential but must also possess content knowledge in all subject areas.

Statement of the Problem

The undetermined status of early childhood education (ECE) preparation for California's K–8 teachers is problematic. Some researchers have found that California TK educators do not have the knowledge and skills to effectively implement developmentally appropriate practice due to a lack of multilayered early childhood education coursework in elementary education bachelor's degree teacher preparation programs (Fong, 2016; Silva, 2016). In professionally preparing K–8 educators, early education preparation has not been a focus for 4-year institutions of higher education (IHEs). While educators at the K, first, and second grade levels *may* have been exposed to a greater number of child development coursework than third through 12th grade peers, it was not required or even necessary for IHEs to provide comprehensive early childhood education coursework. These researched elements will be discussed in detail in upcoming chapters.

The ECE system appeared to be less focused than LEA systems on content-specific knowledge and more heavily focused on instructional approaches, learning environment configurations, and the impact of brain development research on intentional teaching. A Child Development Permit “authorizes the holder to provide service in the care, development, and *instruction* [emphasis added] of children in a child care and development program” (California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 2016, para. 2) with one option of requirement satisfaction being the completion of “an associate degree or higher in early childhood education or child development or a related field” (California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 2016, p. 3).

Purpose of the Study

Examining and understanding the experiences associated with TK teachers coming from a K–8 background, preparation, and credentialing system to an ECE teaching assignment, will contribute not only to an identifiable research gap (Henderson, 2016; Núñez-Pineda, 2016; Silva, 2016; Soria, 2016) but will also inform California and nationwide stakeholders about foreseeable challenges for children in current California TK cohorts. Study participants will have an opportunity to provide important contributions and unique insights. Intending to provide a spotlight on professional preparation differences between K–8 and ECE programs will be a central theme throughout this study. Understanding and acknowledging the differences between the program foci will be key to ensuring that future educational policy efforts consider the ramifications of legislating a program without necessary preparation of those who will be implementing the program.

Theoretically, children in California TK classrooms may be assigned to teachers who lack appropriate knowledge about the development and developmental needs of young children and the correlating best practices of instruction and developmentally appropriate learning environments (Henderson, 2016; Núñez-Pineda, 2016; Silva, 2016; Soria, 2016). This could result in children being ill-prepared for the academic rigors of kindergarten, early elementary school, and beyond. Moreover, children in classrooms where developmentally inappropriate practice is implemented may not be supported by intentional social-emotional preparation which is critical in later school success (Alexander, 2014; Betawi, Jabbar, & Sinaria, 2018; Charlesworth & Deboer, 2000). Extending this challenge to parents who are often referred to as a child’s “first teachers” (Barger, 2008; Mccarren, 2009; Stasova, 2015; Zeece, 2005), modeling of ineffective or inappropriate practices by an educator may result in further ineffectiveness as

parents and caregivers typically follow teacher guidance in educating their children (Núñez-Pineda, 2016). Detrimental societal impacts of poor educational foundations are well-documented in scholarly literature and have become increasingly important to stakeholders and politicians at all levels. California's Senate Bill 837 was authored by then-Senator Darrel Steinberg based on investigations related to the societal benefits of having quality instruction and program practices targeted toward early education.

Determining the number of teachers who have been “grandfathered” into TK, those who have been ascertained to be qualified by a local education agency, and those who have completed early education and child development units, could be established straightforwardly. Determining the quality of instruction and knowledge regarding developmentally appropriate practice may not be as easily ascertained. Such determinations would involve lengthy classroom observations over time.

Recognizing that TK is a new phenomenon in California education, researchers from various California institutes of education including Mills College, University of California at San Francisco and Hayward, and the Center for Gravity in Pleasant Hill, have begun to address the complication of LEA administrators providing oversight of TK programs. In a 2018 article entitled, “We’ll Come Back When You’re Teaching: Examining the Need for Curricular Reform in Higher Education in Response to the Introduction of Transitional Kindergarten in California’s Public Schools,” Nicholson, Lin, Maniates, Woolley, Grant-Groves, and Engdahl suggested that school site administrators may not have familiarity of early education developmentally appropriate practice. “These leaders may not have the knowledge base and skills needed to effectively provide instructional leadership and supervision for early childhood teachers” (p. 2). Adding to the concerns about the preparation of TK teachers, the authors opined, “the extent to

which early childhood pedagogy and practices are truly being incorporated into TK classrooms across the state *requires examination* [emphasis added]” (p. 3). In a sobering statement of concern, the work of these researchers brings the challenges of the TK phenomenon to the fore: “Continuing to leave out any information in workforce preparation may result in TK, one of California’s signature investments in statewide early childhood systems reform, failing to incorporate early childhood in any authentic or substantive way” (p. 4).

In California, ECE funds have been targeted toward children in high-risk situations including children and families in poverty (Education Week, 2016; Hatfield, Lower, Cassidy, & Faldowski, 2015; PR Newswire, 2014, 2016; Tau & Porter, 2014). Research has indicated that at-risk children who enter public school without targeted and early intervention may experience a continuum of low proficiency outcomes in academics and behavior (Bailet, Repper, Murphy, Piasta, & Zettler-Greeley, 2013; Landry et al., 2014). Similarly, children in poverty and other at-risk situations may attend neighborhood schools where teacher quality may be unequal to teacher quality in neighborhoods attributed with greater affluence (Johnson, 2012; Kucsera, Siegel-Hawley, & Orfield, 2014; Logan, Minca, & Adar, 2012; Stosich, 2016). Such concerns are present not only in California, but across the nation. Enhancing teacher quality is imperative if at-risk children are to be provided a robust foundation in learning and later success. A review of current research provided in Chapter 2 will uncover societal challenges related to ineffective instruction and lack of understanding regarding developmentally appropriate practice in TK classrooms.

Research Questions

To understand the impact, consequences, and outcomes of the varied complexities of early education and general education teacher preparation, permit and certification requirements, theoretical knowledge, professional dispositions, and implementation practices, it is crucial to offer TK teachers opportunities to provide direct and meaningful input. Such input will reveal legislative action consequences, preparation program results, and program implementation strengths and challenges. Two research questions were developed:

1. How do California local education agency educators assigned to teach in transitional kindergarten classrooms describe the content, quality, and quantity of early childhood education and child development coursework in pre-service K–8 degree preparation programs and credential acquirement?

Understanding that LEA teacher confidence in implementing research-based developmentally appropriate practices, widely implemented by the non-LEA ECE workforce, a second key research question was developed:

2. How do California local education agency educators assigned to teach in transitional kindergarten classrooms describe their experiences implementing research-based early childhood education developmentally appropriate practices in a TK classroom?

These probing questions will be reinforced by sub-level inquiries. The inquiries will focus on the unique reflections, experiences, and perceptions of current California teachers assigned to transitional kindergarten. The inquiries will provide a platform for teachers to share preparation and professional experiences.

Rationale, Relevance, and Significance of the Study

Teachers preparing children must themselves be prepared. Preparing educators is the responsibility of institutions of higher education (IHEs) who develop coursework and preparation programs (Arnold-Lincove, Osborne, Dillon, & Mills, 2014; Norris, 2013). IHEs develop preparation programs based on both governmental mandates and institutional philosophy. Governmental mandates include adopting and complying with California's Commission on Teacher Credentialing (Kornfeld, Grady, Marker, Ruddell, & Rapp, 2007; Mary, 2006). The institutional philosophies of colleges and universities drive how the mandates will be delivered on IHE campuses (Chang, Early, & Winton, 2005). Opportunities for professional learning, once a teaching candidate becomes employed, become the responsibility of LEAs in collaboration with teachers, teacher associations, and needs assessments as determined by student outcomes (Adams, Lo, Goodell, & Nachtigal, 2017). Such complexities may leave stakeholders focused on the needs and challenges of adults in a system, rather than on children.

A conundrum exists in California as it appears that children who attend LEA TK classrooms between 2012 and 2020 may not be provided with a Free and Appropriate Education (FAPE). While designed to support children with special needs in least restrictive environments (LRE), FAPE also addresses the legal need for children to be academically successful (Myhill, 2004; Zirkel, 2013). To be sure, public education will remain free of cost; however, the "A" (or "Appropriate") in FAPE may now be compromised for far too many children with the potential of negative individual, grade level cohort, community, and societal impacts. As previously evidenced, questions and concerns related to California K–8 educators' preparation backgrounds and formal, on-the-job professional learning experiences focused on ECE DAP may be lacking in California TK classrooms. "The way teachers teach in ECE is very different from the way

teachers are teaching in K–12 and *there is worry* [emphasis added] with TK that is going to be K–12 pushing down the paradigms, as opposed to a kind of ‘pushing up’” (Dahlia as cited by Nicholson, Lin, Maniates, Woolley, Grant-Groves, & Engdahl, 2018, p. 15).

Before 2015 and in response to inconsistencies in ECE workforce preparation coursework throughout the community college system, the California Community Colleges Curriculum Alignment Project (CA CC CAP), funded by the California Department of Education (CDE), developed a 24 unit lower-division early care and education teacher preparation course continuum. These eight courses represented evidence-based modules intended to be the foundational core for all early care and teaching professionals. The eight courses, later to be known as CAP Classic, included: Child Growth & Development; Child, Family & Community; Introduction to Curriculum; Principles & Practices of Teaching Young Children; Observation & Assessment; Health, Safety & Nutrition; Teaching in a Diverse Society; and a Practicum (Child Development Training Consortium funded by the CDE, Early Education and Support Division, n.d.).

CAP Classic course development and adoption by a large percentage of the 103 California community colleges offering ECE preparation coursework, was followed by CAP Expansion to include seven additional courses in the three specialization areas of Infant/Toddler, Administration, and Children with Special Needs. The seven courses included: Infant/Toddler Development, Infant/Toddler Care and Education, Introduction to Young Children with Special Needs, Curriculum and Strategies for Children with Special Needs, Administration I - Programs in ECE, Administration II - Leadership and Supervision, and Adult Supervision and Mentoring.

The California Child Development Training Consortium (CA CDTC) was under contract with the CDE to develop CAP TK teacher preparation courses by July 2017 which were

catalogued by participating community colleges summer 2018. Coursework includes: Preschool and Early Primary Age Development, TK and Early Primary Teaching Principles and Practices, Assessment and Documentation Tools/Methods/Strategies, and Strategies for Working with Challenging Behaviors. Additionally, core ECE framework single unit courses will round out the TK offerings and include Social and Emotional Development, Language and Literacy, Dual Language Learners, Math, Visual Arts, Performing Arts, Movement and Activity, Health, History/Social Science, and Science. Lastly, the TK preparation program will culminate with one practicum placement and one reflective practice seminar. While this may appear to solve the problem of teacher preparedness for some cohorts of children, it is unlikely that educators who possess a 4-year degree and teaching credential will be motivated to enroll in undergraduate coursework. Such enrollment would have no effect on pay scale increases and may be perceived as inferior to the education attained in a 4-year preparation program.

Definition of Terms

While sometimes similar, assumptions about terminology and meaning present barriers to mutual understanding. Diminishing and ending disconnections between educational systems means addressing this barrier by identifying commonalities and using precise language to describe both similar and different concepts. Contextually, existing terminology for similar content differs between ECE and K–8. Teacher candidates prepared in 4-year, pre-credential programs may not have been exposed to the language and contextual rationale of ECE phraseology and expanded meaning.

At grade level. (K–12) In the recent era of federal legislation known as No Child Left Behind, “at grade level” implies a specific target with proficiency bands and cut scores (Perie, 2008) which all children are expected to meet at specified ages.

Developmental. (ECE) This term implies that a child is on a continuum of individual learning without targeted *expectations* (Pufpaff, 2009; Sarama, Clements, Barrett, Van Dine, & McDonel, 2011).

At or around. This term is used to describe early education and developmental continuum bands which record a child's progress on a learning continuum in a particular domain, such as "at or around 48 months" and "at or around 60 months" (California Department of Education, 2008, p. xiv)

Content area. K–12 term for subject areas such as math, language arts, science and social studies ("Content Standards", 2019, para. 1).

Domain. ECE term for subject areas with nuanced meanings including knowledge, skills, and attitude such as cognition, social-emotional learning, motor development, and language and literacy (California Department of Education, 2008, p. v).

Standards. K–12 term for learning goals which defines the knowledge students with average abilities should be able achieve ("Content Standards", 2019, para. 3).

Foundations. ECE term for learning goals which defines the knowledge and skills student with average abilities should be able to achieve (California Department of Education, 2008, p. v).

Proficiency bands or levels. K–12 term for ranges of scaled scores and proficiency level cut off points used with assessment tools. Proficiency bands identify not only student levels of achievement, but also academic targets which learners, through adult educators, must achieve (Combrinck, Scherman, & Maree, 2016, p. 64).

Developmental continuum ratings. ECE term referring to the documentation of the path of learning of individual child such as Responding, Exploring, Building and Integrating. The

developmental continuum ratings identify no targets but rather an observed level of current child progression in a domain. “Expectations for what young children should know and be able to do at certain ages have been related to relative growth trajectories for each individual child *rather than on absolute targets* [emphasis added] benchmarks” (Neuman & Roskos, 2005, p. 126).

California standards for the teacher profession. K–12 resources related to the performance standards for teachers, administrators, and professional learning systems that are intended to help develop the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to increase capacity and improve educator effectiveness (“Professional Standards”, 2018) versus the next term which is:

California early childhood educator competencies. These competencies describe the knowledge, skills and dispositions that early childhood educators need in order to provide high quality care and education to young children and their families (“California Early Childhood Educator Competencies,” 2018).

Pacing guides. K–12 pre-determined guides to what student learning should be in the classroom at any point throughout the year (David, 2008, p. 87) versus the next term which is:

Intentional, planned, purposeful teaching. ECE instructional practices dictated by observed student progression rather than an arbitrary plan that may address the needs of a limited number of learners. “We have relegated important decisions about what and how to teach to publishing companies whose main goal is to make a profit or pacing guides that stifle creativity, narrow curriculum, and replace higher level thinking with discrete facts” (Tieso, 2015, p. 3).

While like-terms, similar content correspondence, and direct correlation connect the worlds of K–8 and ECE, far more terms, concepts, and philosophical variance cause disjointed understanding, system compartmentalization, and segregated thinking. “Early Childhood Education common key terms are ‘development’ and ‘activities’ while in Early Elementary

Education common key terms are ‘methods’ and ‘lessons’ This language illustrates the deep-seated influences of developmental psychology and curriculum theory on ECED and ELED, respectively” (File & Gullo, 2002, p. 127).

Additionally, terms used within the context of talking with teachers can be defined. How teachers *feel* or *think* or *reflect upon* preparation and implementation will be expressed by the stated emotions and understandings of study participants. Worry and contentment, self-doubt and self-confidence, guilt and virtue, insecurity and self-assuredness will provide the context by which study participants, teachers, describe personal experiences with transitional kindergarten. Beliefs, attitudes, ideas about experiences, and self-reflection will inform readers about how teachers feel about their success in TK instruction. The psychology of understanding how professional educators comprehend and evaluate formal preparation, as well as how they interpret their daily interactions with children, will provide a basis for understanding the three worlds of early childhood education, K–8 education, and TK education.

Assumptions, Delimitations, and Limitations

It was assumed that study participants would answer interview questions and prompts in an honest and candid manner. This assumption was predicated on the notion that participants willingly participated in the study and understood the focus of the study as well as the research questions. Additionally, it was assumed that all study participants experienced the same phenomenon which was verified by initial demographic survey but will likely be differing “realities” of the phenomenon. It was assumed that a sufficient number of participants had a sincere desire to contribute to educational research and put aside any motives divergent of this assumption. Lastly, it was assumed that both researcher and participants would mutually influence each other during interview-based conversations (Wargo, 2015).

Delimitations include a variety of related concepts that, while presented in a condensed manner in the study, were not actually studied. This will be especially true with elements of the Conceptual Framework wherein discussions of research findings by other researchers may speak *about*, but not directly to, the focus of current study. Additional boundaries, as discussed in greater detail Chapter 2, included child/student outcomes, classroom configurations, geographic locations, teacher gender, ethnicity, and age, as well as curriculum, length of school day, and school level demographic data (Wargo, 2015).

Limitations over which there was no control included restrictions in scheduling interviews and follow-up conversation, unknown personal conflicts that developed throughout the course of the study for either the researcher or participants, inaccurate or incomplete recollections of preparation program details, or misinterpretation of instructional implementation practices. Methodologically, limitations of time impacted the number of participants included in the study as well as unforeseen complications with interview wording or interpretation so that saturation of the data was not evidenced until later rather than earlier in the study (Wargo, 2015).

Chapter 1 Summary

Findings in scholarly literature identify a clear dichotomy in educator preparation between ECE and LEA entities (Baron, 2014; Silva, 2016). Discussion of language, both unique and shared of ECE and LEA worlds, is a starting point. Discussion of theoretical, contextual, methodological, and conceptual areas of thought and scholarly findings will assist in identifying conclusions and predictions designed to inform the field, policymakers, decision-makers, and all stakeholders about the implications of inadequate educator preparation related to TK.

TK educators, who teach the same-age children as preschool teachers, may have been overlooked in critical preparation components (Maniates, 2016). The problem of incomplete DAP training of K/1-turned-TK teachers and resultant inadequacies in instructional approaches

may result in multiple cohorts of children achieving less-than-desirable outcomes. Differing preparation expectations may have created a conundrum, which is the essence of the problem in this study, when moving 4-year old children from a system requiring teachers to be competent in developmental practice into a system that did not require teachers to be adroit in early childhood instructional strategies.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction to the Literature Review

Understanding that child/student educational outcomes are predicated on a complex structure of sometimes competing interests, it has been established in scholarly circles that *positive teacher-child relationships* (Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Maldonado-Carreño & Votruba-Drzal, 2011; Moritz, Rudasilla, Niehaus, Buhsa, & White, 2013), *teacher instructional quality* (Burchinal, Pianta, Bryant, Early, Clifford, & Barbarin, 2006), and *teacher proficiency levels* (Macken, 2013; Ward, Grudnoff, Brooker, & Simpson, 2011) are key indicators of student outcomes. Focusing primarily on educators' early childhood education (ECE) proficiency levels and instructional strategies, widely known as developmentally appropriate practice or DAP in settings for children of approximately four years of age, a framework for understanding will include how *what* transitional kindergarten (TK) teachers know and believe about early education research and intentional instructional practices, drives practice. Collecting teachers' descriptions of their experiences in choosing instructional practices in TK will inform key stakeholders (such as teachers, local school boards, parent advisory councils, county offices of education and others) about what is currently offered in TK classrooms in California.

Contributing to the field of ECE in local education agency (LEA) settings, California's K–8 system of education, is the primary purpose of this investigation. Understanding how TK educators interpret past professional preparation program experiences and TK teaching experiences, first as candidates and later as classroom teachers, will assist policymakers and other stakeholders in the development of policies and programs best suited to meet the needs of children. The type and quality of instructional practice in ECE classrooms in California and other states should be based on student needs rather than political convenience.

Study topic. Senate Bill 876 required that California teachers assigned to teach TK after July 1, 2015 complete at least 24 units in ECE and/or child development (CD) or have professional experience in a classroom setting with preschool age children that is comparable to 24 ECE and/or CD units as determined by the employing LEA OR be in possession of California CD teacher permit. Teachers who were assigned to and taught TK students before July 1, 2015 were granted an exemption if necessary units had not yet been attained and could be “grandfathered” into TK positions without the mandate of additional educational or credentialing requirements. Appropriate units must be attained by exempted teachers by August 1, 2020. One way to attain such units is through completion of IHE coursework. Another way of attaining such units, as supported by the California Legislature, is through the trainings provided by the California Preschool Instructional Network (CPIN). Discussion of CPIN trainings will be presented in Chapter 3 and discussed in Chapter 4.

In a typical California State University (CSU) Liberal Studies (LS) Bachelor of Arts degree with a concentration in elementary education (EE), students are instructed that “the elementary teacher is usually responsible for teaching most or all subjects in a self-contained classroom, so Liberal Studies Elementary Education includes courses from a wide variety of departments, programs, and disciplines to provide effective subject-matter preparation for the prospective teacher” (Humboldt University Program Requirements, 2016–2017, p. 119). Program review indicated no ECE courses. Only three CD course number/titles in are included: CD 256 “Middle Childhood Development”, CD 355 “Language Development”, and Communication 422 “Children’s Communication Development,” are all optional. Other courses focus on content-related preparation including: general education, psychology, art (creations of the imagination), economics, English, geography, history, physical education, math, music,

science, American Indian Education, and the Arts (which is inclusive of artistic endeavors such as theatre, sculpture, painting, dance, etc.).

Comparison of ECE and/or CD coursework requirements indicated that California public 2-year institutions of higher education require 24 units while California public 4-year institutions of higher education require 9–10 units in child development (across the spectrum of childhood rather than *early* childhood development). This is logical as the K–8 credential and preparation program is designed to prepare teachers for K–8 classrooms, not TK or birth through age three learning environments. Bournfreund, as cited by Kohler, Christensen, and Kilgo (2012) suggested that it is important to sense this dichotomy from a child’s perspective:

Young children either have a teacher who understands how they learn, but lacks subject-area content or they have a teacher who understands knowledge and skills, but lacks insight on how [children] soak up knowledge and skill. Either way, *these teachers are missing important pieces* [emphasis added] of what they need to be effective. (p. 407)

To understand the study topic of LEA TK teacher preparation experiences, one must understand preparation program differences between ECE and the typical K–8 preparation and credentialing programs. Looking at the problem in context of how California, specifically, has prepared educators will provide an initial assessment of why and how a problem exists.

Context. ECE and K–8 public LEA systems traditionally function as autonomous silos from each other (Soria, 2016; Stover, 2013). K–8 teachers are required to be knowledgeable in all content areas. “The Multiple Subject Teaching Credential authorizes the holder to *teach all subjects* [emphasis added] in a self-contained classroom, such as the classrooms in most elementary schools, in grades preschool, K–12, or in classes organized primarily for adults” (California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 2016, p. 1). Understanding these

requirements provides context for understanding the study problem. K–8 teachers have been not required to complete ECE coursework beyond general child development coursework.

The ECE system, based on a review of research study topics of the last decade (see Table 1), appeared to be less focused than LEA systems on content-specific knowledge and more heavily focused on instructional approaches, learning environment configurations, and the impact of brain development research on intentional teaching. A Child Development Permit “authorizes the holder to provide service in the care, development, and *instruction* [emphasis added] of children in a child care and development program” (California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 2016, p. 3) with one option of requirement satisfaction being the completion of “an associate degree or higher in early childhood education or child development or a related field” (California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 2016), yet:

Holding lower educational expectations for early childhood educators than for elementary school teachers perpetuates the perception that educating children before kindergarten requires less expertise than educating early elementary students, which in turn helps justify policies that make it difficult to maximize the potential of young children and the early learning programs that serve them. Disparate degree requirement policies also create a bifurcated job market, both between elementary schools and early education and within early education as a result of degree requirements. This situation potentially perpetuates a *cycle of disparity in the quality of learning experiences for young children* [emphasis added]. (National Research Council and Institute of Medicine Committee on the Science, 2015, p. 7)

It is within the contexts of educator preparation through institutions of higher education (IHEs), credentialing requirements through governmental agencies, subject competence versus

pedagogical competence, educational community terminology, and philosophical approaches to education that this study was conducted. Looking at the phenomenon of the TK experience requires a wide conceptual understanding of factors that impact educator experiences.

Significance. The significance of the identified research problem of K–8 educator preparedness to implement appropriate instruction in TK programs can be rationalized pragmatically, socially, and educationally. *Pragmatically*, children who are offered learning environments suitable for children of later developmental stages may suffer academically, socially, and emotionally (Huang & Invernizzi, 2012; Raffaele, Mendez, Kim, Ferron & Woods, 2015). Children who are four years of age (or approximately 48 months of age) often lack the emotional self-regulation skills, social skills, and learning foundations to be successful in a classroom environment more suitable for children of approximately five years of age (Allen, 2014; Denham, Hamada, Bassett, Thayer, Mincic, Sirotkin, & Zinsser, 2012; Li, Cao, Hu, Li, 2017; Longobardi, Spataro, D’Alessandro, & Cerutti, 2017). Instruction which is teacher-directed and informational in nature rather than child-centered, explorative, and discovery-based may reduce the depth and rate of learning in children if foundational experiences in classroom settings have been limited (Lerkkanen, Kiuru, Pakarinen, Poikkeus, Rasku-Puttonen, Siekkinen, & Nurmi, 2016).

Socially, detrimental impacts of poor educational foundations are well-documented in scholarly educational literature (Hanushek, 2011; Paolini, 2015; Tate, 2011) and have become increasingly important to stakeholders and politicians at all levels. Under-prepared teachers and thereby under-prepared children may lead not only to undesirable academic and educational outcomes for individual and particular cohorts of children, but also to undesirable societal outcomes. California’s Senate Bill 837, authored by then-Senator Darrel Steinberg, was based on

investigations related to the societal benefits of having quality instruction and program practices targeted toward early education. “High quality early education generate[s] seven dollars or more in savings for every dollar invested. Savings include higher lifetime earnings for students, lower rates of students repeating grade levels, lower placements in special education programs and lower crime rates” (Steinberg, 2014, n.p.).

Educational rationalization regarding teacher preparation and implementation practices is layered in complex and contentious debate. “Debates [center] on how to combine best practices as identified in education research with actual and timely implementation in classrooms” (Muschamp, 2013, p. 34). Likewise, other contemporary researchers found that “Missing from the discourse is recognition that much of what we know from research on learning and instruction has yet to affect the design and enactment of everyday schooling” (Goldman & Pellegrino, 2015). Further supporting the notion that research and practice have been done in isolation one to the other, Goe and Stickler (2008) found that “Research has not been very successful at identifying the specific teacher qualifications, characteristics, and classroom practices that are most likely to improve student learning. Unfortunately, this is just the information that educational policymakers need most” (p. 1). Whitty (2013) suggested that “the relationship between research and policy and practice in education is a long-standing issue” (p. 159). Additionally, the complexity and contentiousness are sometimes palpable such as reflected in Whitty’s (2013) additional comment:

No one who regularly reviews papers and research proposals could deny that there is some poor-quality research in education, but then so there is in medicine and other fields with which education is often unfavourably (sic) compared. Clearly, there is some excellent research going on in education departments and it is galling that this is so rarely

acknowledged. (Whitty, 2013, p. 161)

Moving children from educational environments rich in DAP to educational environments focused on proficiency of grade level content standards based on assessment may have reflected the *putting the cart before the horse* idiom (which means to reverse logical order). While possibly viewed as logistically challenging (Drago-Severson, 2007; Terrehoff, 2002), providing training about DAP, implications of brain development, and knowledge of social and emotional development *before* children of approximately four years of age were moved to LEA settings could have resulted in more children spending learning time with appropriately prepared teachers. With a 2014–2015 estimate of 83,321 children enrolled in TK (76% in TK “stand-alone” or TK children only rather than combination grade configurations with more than one grade in a single classroom), approximately 3,472 teachers were assigned to TK classrooms. Enrollments continue to increase.

Student enrollment in LEAs is critical for fiscal stability. TK in California, like K, is an option for parents and guardians, not a mandate. “Average Daily Attendance (ADA) for students who turn five by December 2 and attend TK should be reported with all other TK/K–3 ADA through the Principal Apportionment Data Collection” (California Department of Education, Frequently Asked Questions, 2016). 2015–2016 and 2016–2017 per pupil apportionment funding based on grade spans indicated that LEAs received \$7,083 ADA for each [TK and] K–3 student. The following year the allocation increased to \$7,820 per student (California Department of Education, 2017).

Statement of problem. While there are limited empirical findings regarding TK (Arbizzi, 2016; Facaros, 2017; Fenney, 2016; Soria, 2016), tension exists when considering that LEA educators may not have the knowledge and skills (Darling-Hammond & Baratz-Snowden,

2007; Wayman, Foster, Mantle-Bromley, & Wilson, 2003) to effectively implement developmentally appropriate practice due to a lack of ECE coursework in elementary education bachelor degree teacher preparation programs (Fong, 2016; Maniates, 2016; Silva, 2016;). As expressed by a participant in Maniates' (2016) research, which looked closely at cultural-specific instructional practices, "She said she felt fortunate that she had taken [optional] child development courses in her teacher preparation programme (sic), remarking that [educational institutions] do not prepare teachers with a holistic view of child development" (p. 757). Interview discussions conducted for this research project reflected Maniates' (2016) desire to capture teacher experiences.

Silva (2016) noted "most teachers hired to teach in TK classrooms hold a multiple subject credential, where little to no information about preschool development is covered in teacher preparation" (p. 22). Educators and IHEs participated in and developed (respectively) preparation programs based on K–12 structures and students, not early childhood. As reported by States News Service (2011) "preparation, licensing and hiring systems are not currently designed to produce and place teachers in early grade classrooms who have a strong understanding of child development" (p. 3).

Lack of research-based DAP implementation is evident in both developmentally inappropriate instructional and classroom environment practices by teachers who have been issued PS/K–12 credentials (File & Gullo, 2002; Maynard, La Paro, & Johnson, 2014; Vartuli & Rohs, 2009). Enhancing TK/K–8 teacher knowledge about DAP in early education is imperative if all children, especially at-risk children, are to be provided a robust foundation for learning and later academic success. "Research shows that achievement gaps appear early and widen over the years that children are in school" (National Association of Elementary School Principals, 2014

para. 1). According to early childhood experts, the ramifications of developmentally inappropriate practice (referred to as “DIP”) may include a child becoming frustrated and disengaged in learning to underdevelopment of neurological pathways that are instrumental in later academic growth and learning (Rushton, Juola-Rushton, & Larkin, 2010). This study will provide a basis for understanding what teachers experience in TK program implementation.

LEA teachers who *do* attempt to fully implement research-based developmentally appropriate practice in (TK) classrooms, may experience myriad external pressures including “pressure from upper grades teachers and curriculum constraints within a school district, [which] make it increasingly difficult to teach in a developmentally appropriate manner” (Parker & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2006). Similarly, Speedie (2016) asserted that “studies have shown that teachers with higher levels of education were more likely to implement DAP” (p. 20) and “inclusion of DAP is influenced by parental pressure, administrators, and policies which favoured (sic) more structured basic-skills instruction rather than DAP, and high teacher-student ratios” (p. 20).

California children in TK classrooms may be assigned to teachers who, by no fault of their own or the IHE preparation system, lack appropriate knowledge about the developmental and unique needs of young children in TK classrooms, and the correlating acknowledged and research-supported best practices of instruction and developmentally appropriate learning environments identified in early education research and policy. “To staff TK classrooms [during the 2012–2013 school year], most districts reported reassigning teachers already teaching in the district, for example, by moving a K teacher into a newly established TK classroom in each school” (American Institutes of Research, April 2014, p. 4). Reassignment of teachers from one grade to another could result in the challenge of some children being ill-prepared for the

academic rigors of later elementary levels. Future outcomes of students in the current TK cohorts may reveal the unplanned-for consequences of these actions. Moreover, children in TK classrooms where developmentally inappropriate practice (DIP) is implemented may not be supported by intentional social-emotional preparation which is critical in later school success:

The core features of emotional development include the ability to identify and understand one's own feelings, to accurately read and comprehend emotional states in others, to manage strong emotions and their expression in a constructive manner, to regulate one's own behavior, to develop empathy for others, and to establish and maintain relationships. Young children who exhibit healthy social, emotional, and behavioral adjustment are more likely to have good academic performance in elementary school. (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2004, as cited by the California Department of Education, 2016, n.p.)

As an essential continuum of social-emotional development, teachers must not only understand the overall and complex development of children in myriad domains, but teachers must also have the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to recognize children's attainment (or lack thereof) and be able to support and enhance emotional growth.

Organization. Organization of Chapter 2 is a hybrid of historical, conceptual, and methodological review. Historically, there is little LEA TK research (Fong, 2016; Silva, 2016) due wholly to the novelty of TK in U.S. education. The history of U.S. K, however, is vast and has been embedded in research throughout many decades of education research. (Fong, 2016; Herota, 2015; Silva, 2016). This change in practices, collaboration, and reduction of institutional “siloeing” (a system of perceived separation, hidden agendas, and isolation which may hinder

communication and collaboration) may significantly and positively improve American education in the coming years. The future for thousands of young children is concerning.

Following discussion of the conceptual framework, various perspectives related to the study of educator preparation and program implementation experiences are presented.

Descriptions of current research related to educator preparation are considered for both ECE and LEA systems and are coupled with research indicating the value of DAP in educational settings. State and national research projects, as well as TK studies currently underway and awaiting peer review, are organized by connectivity to and impact on the problem of this project.

Conceptual Framework

Building a conceptual framework for this study topic includes a certain level of ambiguity rather than specificity. While there are related topics, there is insufficient empirical data related directly to the professional preparation of teachers for transitional kindergarten. Accordingly, the conceptual framework has been developed based on these key related elements: Researcher Dispositions, Child Development Theories and Appropriate Practices, Early Childhood Education Research, Early Childhood Education Developmentally Appropriate Practice, California-Specific K–12 Teacher Preparation and Credentialing, Complexities of Early Childhood Education, and Comparisons Between Early Childhood Educator and K–12 Teacher Preparation.

Researcher dispositions. Linking researcher disposition, interests, and positionality to current and historical scholarly literature as well as methodological inclinations reflects an on-going priority of responding to the simple but formidable question, “what is best for children?” Decades of teaching, administering, and overseeing of education programs at the classroom, school, district, county, and state levels has underscored the need to authentically consider the

needs of children first. As affirmed by Walker, Kutsyuruba, and Bishop-Yong (2011), “Policy related to educator preparation, quality, effectiveness, and employment must always be seen through the lens of effect on children. . . .best interests of students [are] a lighthouse giving perspective and helping us navigate. . . .best course” (p. 49).

The problem of early childhood preparation for TK teachers and classroom/program implementation was originally derived from personal and inside experiences of working with and supervising teachers and from developing LEA programs that endeavored to meet the needs of young children. Such self-reflection, as suggested by McMahon and McGannon (2016), is important. “One’s own storied journey, and the experiences that follow are by no means conclusive, finalized or absolute, but represent a cross section of adherences as well as theoretical and methodological realisations (sic) and tensions encountered” and “narrative analysis means that it has been utilised (sic) by qualitative researchers in a number of ways” (p. 97). Likewise, Ragland (2006) shared that personal experiences impacted research when disclosing:

When I considered research in my practice as a supervisor of teachers, I sought ways to explore aspects of my personal experience. Heeding Reason’s (1994) call for ‘critical subjectivity’ in attending to the ground on which one stands, I suggest that it is possible, by craning my neck or standing on tiptoe, as it were, to change positions, if not to leave the ground entirely. (p. 1)

Following McMahon and McGannon’s (2015); Thoresen and Öhlén’s (2015); Ragland’s (2006); Berger’s (2013); Trimmer, Black, and Riddle’s (2014) examples, I express directly to readers that I have experienced supervising kindergarten and early elementary teachers who largely did not have the educational background to effectively teach TK. Gaining in-depth

knowledge of ECE best practices in later professional years further validated this belief. Preparation programs did not prepare these teachers, nor was it expected, to teach early education with the pedagogical understanding now understood to be essential. Consequently, children in current TK classrooms and in the classrooms of similarly educated teachers may not be receiving a developmentally appropriate education.

This study should be considered a new avenue of research. While teacher preparation has been widely studied, explicit TK preparation has not been adequately studied or sufficiently confirmed. Revealing questions about LEA, K–8 credentialed teachers teaching four-year old children in a new LEA early education setting follows Machi and McEvoy’s (2013) direction to “[expose] an unanswered question, the question that needs primary research” (p. 113). New knowledge presented in this study is intended to enlighten the wider community of educational practice and encourage review, critique, and confirmation of findings. Additionally, the professional vantage point of an experienced elementary education site and district-level administrator serves as a guide to collecting and analyzing data in a unique way. Establishing theoretical coherence of multiple perspectives and different points of view will provide an understanding of the new phenomenon of TK in California to inform both state and national stakeholders about the problem of LEA TK teacher preparation.

Child development theories and appropriate practices. Understanding the degree to which DAP is implemented in TK classrooms is supported by a variety of theories. Descriptive theories of child development come from the perspective of identifying and tracking milestones of typically developing children. Genetic and biological endowments are highlighted as developmental foundations in studies which associate expectations of a specific age group and developmental trajectories. “Human development automatically results in the appearance of

sequential developmental stages over time in a predictable manner on the basis of genetic potentials” (Avan & Kirkwood, 2010, p. 389) and was also the neuroconstructivist framework focus for Westermann, Mareschal, Johnson, Sirois, Spratling, and Thomas (2006). “Building [an accountability] system requires a parsimonious but comprehensive set of developmental outcomes expected of children between birth and age eight” (Priest, McConnell, Walker, & Carta, 2008, p. 163).

Early childhood education research. A psychological construct-based frame applied in the scholarly works of Piaget, Kohlberg, Freud, and Erikson among others provide another perspective in the conceptual framework. “Psychological construct-based theories focus on generic principles to explain the layout of child development based on psychological structures (constructs) and usually do not address the reasons behind developmental changes” (Avan & Kirkwood, 2010, p. 389). Suggesting that children move from one developmental stage to the next in predictable stages is evident, but the influences of emotion and internal psychological make-up impact the degree to which children develop in each stage. Piaget was a leading scholar in this area (Barrouillet, 2015; Berenson, 1981; Carey, Zaitchik, & Bascandziev, 2015) who was studied by Kohlberg (Boom, 2011; Wendorf, 2001) who then adopted many of Piaget’s principles and also added scholarly information about the development of moral reasoning. Piaget was an important contributor to the foundations of psychology and human development. “To Piaget, cognitive development was a progressive reorganization of mental processes as a result of biological maturation and environmental experience. Children construct an understanding of the world, then experience discrepancies between what they already know and what they discover” (McLeod, 2015, p. 2). Piaget identified four stages of the cognitive development in children which include: (a) sensorimotor stage (birth to age 2), (b) pre-

operational stage (from age 2 to age 7), (c) concrete operational stage (from age 7 to age 11), and (d) formal operational stage (age 11+ - adolescence and adulthood) (Ghazi, Khan, Shahzada, & Ullah, 2014).

While highly valuable as a contribution to understanding the development of young human beings and widely respected, Piaget's work has been challenged. Such challenges continue to influence the understanding of brain development beyond Piagetian theory. For instance, Hopkins (2011) noted that Piaget "rarely reported anything about how he selected participants, how many children he examined to arrive at his conclusions, or anything even remotely statistical beyond the age. . . of individual children who gave answers to his queries" (p. 15). Additionally, "Stage theories of development have fallen out of favor in developmental research. One problem is that stages often fail to capture the complexities of intraindividual and interindividual variation in development" (Hopkins, 2011, para. 6).

Additional criticisms of Piagetian theory can be summarized as: the theory lacked scientific study protocol (Beins, 2016; Hopkins, 2011) as he used his own three children for study who were raised in the Western culture of Geneva where they went to school and were likely taught specific ways of thinking (culturally specific influence) (Beins, 2016; Fowler, 2017; Hopkins, 2011). Additionally, Piaget may have underestimated children's abilities as there was no sensitivity between competency and performance (children may have been competent but could not perform) (Beins; 2016; Clements, Fuson, & Sarama, 2017; Fowler, 2017). Next, children's motivation and emotion were not accounted for, and for some, the theoretical stages were too broad (Beins, 2016; Clements, Fuson, & Sarama, 2017; Fowler, 2017; Hopkins, 2011).

Reiterating Hopkins' (2011) statement that "stages often fail to capture the complexities of intraindividual and interindividual variation in development," the California Preschool

Learning Foundations (CA PLF) identify developmental domains of cognitive learning and continuums of development rather than specific stages. Emotional development, a crucial developmental domain, is an essential element of the CA PLF. “Young children’s development in this domain influences their ability to adapt successfully to preschool and, later on, in school” (CA PLF, Volume 1, p. xii). Deep understanding of these learning foundations is key to professional preparation for early childhood educators.

Context-based frameworks such as those provided by Bandura (2002), Bronfenbrenner (1979), and Avan and Kirkwood (2010) bring a third perspective about the complexities of child development. “From a contextualism perspective, developmental changes occur on the basis of give-and-take (bidirectional) relations between the child and the context, that is the environment changes the child and the child changes the environment” (Avan & Kirkwood, 2010, p. 390). The notion that the development of a child is entirely influenced by social environment and that children influence the environment in a way that creates a new environment is considered context-based learning. Framing *how* a child develops rather than placing a child in a particular age-specific stage is essential (Avan & Kirkwood, 2010).

Early childhood education developmentally appropriate practice. Blending the perspectives of descriptive theory of cognitive continuum (Avan & Kirkwood, 2010, p. 388), psychological construct based frames of emotion and social learning instincts (Carpendale & Lewis, 2004, p. 79), and a contextualist frame of culture (Lee & Johnson, 2007, p. 233) have formed the basis of child development understanding and the foundations of developmentally appropriate practices. “While academic rigor focuses on one dimension of education--academic--DAP considers the whole landscape of learning--motivational, cultural, socioemotional as well as cognitive” (Brown & Mawry, 2015, n.p.). To one degree or another, these understandings

have been the foundation of educational preparation programs for teachers; DAP for 2-year ECE preparation and academic rigor for 4-year LEA preparation. It is the extent to which these theories have informed stakeholders and the degree to which stakeholders have adopted these approaches that will frame the central problem in this investigation. Additionally, the lenses of ideology, politics, personal perspective, social morality, and equity influenced the collection of research data and scholarly findings presented in this chapter.

California-specific K–12 teacher preparation and credentialing. Discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3, the qualitative research design of this study includes the application of an approach known as purposeful sampling. Transitional kindergarten teachers in good standing with the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing were the primary study sample. Two samples within this group were teachers who participated in the California Preschool Instructional Network (CPIN) transitional kindergarten trainings and teachers who have not. The key dimension of transitional kindergarten as the primary sampling requirement was followed by looking at these two variant populations within the primary sample. To provide a greater understanding of the phenomenon of transitional kindergarten in California, teacher choices for meeting the requirements of current law were examined.

The study of teachers' experiences with TK requires a considerable amount of elucidation that will have meaning for decision-makers who have the authority to modify, add to, or change existing systems of education. It was anticipated that new insights would be gained by talking with teachers about the concepts and variables herein identified. Addressing the scholarly knowledge gap regarding formal preparation and self-perceived instructional competence will inform readers about any identified needs to modify teacher preparation expectations.

Educators' perceptions of professional preparation programs are important for the reason that the degree to which educators believe they have been provided depth of knowledge about educational practices (American Institute of Research, 2016; Buchanan, Burts, Bidner, White, & Charlesworth, 1998; Liu, 2007) and the degree to which they practiced prior to entering employment in an LEA, impacted both proficiency and confidence in the implementation of DAP. The topic of ECE preparation and instructional experiences of California certificated elementary school educators assigned to TK programs ultimately, and most importantly, impacts the educational experiences of children.

Complexities of early childhood education. Based on this conceptual framework, boundaries of the study have been established. Child academic outcomes, longitudinal review of outcomes between children who attended TK and those who did not, teacher demographics of gender, age, ethnicity, race, county of employment, and early childhood education and K–12 preparation programs in other states were not studied. Additionally, factors such as single grade and combination class configurations, average child:teacher ratios (31:4 for LEAs and 12:1 for non-LEA licensed preschools), parent involvement, part- or full-day program configurations, adopted curriculum and the like, were not included in this study.

Comparisons between early childhood educator and K–12 teacher preparation. Findings and theories related to early education in general, California TK in particular, and correlating studies related to professional development and teacher preparation entry frame this study. Summarization of demographic survey data, one-on-one qualitative interview activities, and organization of participant interview themes regarding preparation to teach and implementation confidence activities will inform interested stakeholders about the status of TK

classroom environments in California. The relevance of studying complex child/student needs and teacher preparation to meet these needs will be highlighted throughout this chapter.

Review of Research Literature and Methodological Literature

ECE research of all quality levels is readily available and has been for many decades. Review of specific and applicable reports conducted by ECE researchers has changed the landscape of DAP and has widened the understanding of ECE best practices and appropriate learning environment structure. Until such a time exists when research studies relative to TK have been conducted, empirical data is virtually non-existent. Available correlating research will be discussed, analyzed, and evaluated together with reports related specifically to the study topic.

Early childhood education research. A major research report, “From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development,” identifies authors, researchers, research assistants, contributors, funders, and supporters of the Institute of Medicine’s *From Neurons to Neighborhoods* 2000 report. Contributors included notable names in the fields of social policy (Duncan), psychology and psychiatry (Coates, Earls, Emde, Gilman Goldin-Meadow, Lieberman, MacWhinney, Thompson), child development (Gunnar, Nelson), pediatrics (Gross), biology (Greenaugh), family studies (Massinga), human development (Guralnick, Lozoff), and education (Garcia, Raudenbush). Funded by both public and private sponsors, the report synthesized only high-quality research, as defined by study authors, of the past three decades to produce a scholarly document with enormous early childhood education impact. Review of the quality of the studies in the report is without reproach. Examining and amalgamating three decades of scholarly research about child development culminated in four significant findings:

- Early experiences affect the development of the brain and lay the foundation for intelligence, emotional health, and moral development.
- Healthy early development depends on nurturing and dependable relationships.
- How young children feel is as important as how they think, particularly with regard to school readiness.
- And although society is changing, *the needs of young children are not being met* [emphasis added] in the process. (National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2000, p. 4)

One hundred and seventeen pages of references in *Neurons to Neighborhoods* (2000) indicated that the National Research Council and Institute of Medicine and research team took seriously the task of reviewing decades of substantive investigation regarding brain development and activity, biological endowment, early experiences, predictions of intelligence and emotional disposition, early exposure to trauma, nature, and nurture. As indicated by report editors:

Over the past three decades, the rate of generation of new knowledge about early childhood development has been staggering. The prospect of increasing collaboration among neurobiologists, geneticists, and social scientists offers the exciting promise of still greater breakthroughs in understanding the complex interplay between nature and nurture as they jointly influence the process of human development during early childhood. (Neurons to Neighborhoods, 2000, p. 20)

Developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood education. Neurology and brain research have a definitive place in educator preparation as they are the *how* of teaching, rather than the *what* of teaching. The how of teaching in early education rests squarely on the understanding of DAP. DAP was developed based on neurology and brain development. As

discussed in forthcoming sections, ECE have been less focused than LEA colleagues on content-specific knowledge, but rather on instructional approaches, learning environments, and the impact of brain development research on intentional teaching and pedagogy.

Conversely, the K–12 community during the same period was heavily focused on grade level standards and student outcomes accountability. Hirsch, Lappan, and Reys (2000) validated this assertion when stating that “The legislative decision to produce standards has been a change of enormous importance in the history of American education” (p. 89) as did Brewbaker (1997) when noting that “The movement to create national standards was sparked by the Six National Goals for Education formulated in 1990 by the nation’s governors, then embraced by both the Bush and Clinton administrations” (p. 78). Studies regarding standard strands including science, language arts, mathematics, physical education, and use of technology filled research databases rather than pedagogical considerations. K–8 standards, as developed locally by states, became the driving force in classroom education. “We do have a problem in the academic preparation of teachers: only a minority-39%—have a bachelors or graduate degree in ANY academic field” (Ravitch, 2003, n.p.). Stated differently, 4-year degrees, which most public-school teachers possess, may not indicate specialized training in a particular subject area or developmental stage. Holding a bachelor’s degree, any bachelor’s degree, did not equate to subject competence or DAP (Abel, 2015; Konold, Jablonski, Nottingham, Kessler, Byrd & Imig, 2008; Lewis, 2011; Saracho, 2012).

In California, ECE funds have been targeted toward children in high-risk situations including children and families in poverty (Jacobson, 2008; MENA Report, 2016). This idea is significant when considering that “although there a wide range of federal programs focused on quality supports for child development and early learning, much of the funding invested comes

from state and local resources” (Institute of Medicine and National Research Council, 2015, p. 677). Furthermore, research has indicated that at-risk children who enter public “school without targeted and early intervention may experience a continuum of low proficiency outcomes (Lefmann & Combs-Orme, 2014; Leventhal, Fauth, Brooks-Gunn, 2005; Walsh, Madaus, Raczek, Dearing, Foley, An, Lee-St. John, & Beaton, 2014). Children in poverty and other at-risk situations may attend neighborhood schools where teacher quality may be unequal to teacher quality in neighborhoods attributed with greater affluence (McEwen & Stewart, 2014; Williams-Shanks & Robinson, 2012).

Such concerns are present not only in California, but across the nation. “Too few American children get off to a good start [and] this is particularly true for children who live in poverty and for immigrants and other children in the early grades” (National Association of Elementary School Principals, 2014, p. 4). A good start, in a high-quality program with highly qualified teachers who implement the best practices of DAP, is essential for a successful continue of education. Indeed, a good start begins prior to TK during the cradle, toddler, and preschooler years with educational communities having high levels of responsibility. Poor quality at one level can thwart positive outcomes at any point during the cradle to college to career continuum.

California-specific K–12 teacher preparation and credentialing. As indicated in a second major research report, “Transitional Kindergarten in California” (American Institute of Research, also referred to as AIR, 2016, p. 5), 75% of students in California TK classrooms are led by teachers who have no experience in TK also means that these teachers have likely not had pedagogical preparation (brain development, social emotional development, DAP) equivalent to non-LEA preschool counterparts. “Sixty-five percent of [TK] teachers reported that they had

earned *some* units in early childhood education/childhood development as of the 2014–2015 year” AIR Research Brief, June 2015, p. 5). *Some* was not defined in the brief.

While data from the April 2015 American Institute of Research (AIR) report did reveal that newly assigned TK teachers reported having teaching experience at the preschool, K and/or first grade levels, “the largest group of teachers—87%—reported teaching kindergarten” (p. 4) as their past early education professional experience” (p. 4). “The youngest kids in a kindergarten class risk struggling academically, emotionally and/or socially” (Early Edge California, 2016, para. 5). “The vast majority had experience teaching kindergarten” (AIR Brief, June 2017, p. 4). Additionally, “Ninety-six percent of TK teachers reported have an elementary (multiple subject) teacher credential (American Research Institutes Research Brief, June 2015, p. 4). The brief, *Transitional Kindergarten in California: What Do Transitional Kindergarten Classrooms Look Like in the Third Year of the Program’s Implementation?* succinctly describes educator experiences at particular grade levels again accentuating the notion that TK teachers come from K–12 preparation programs.

In 2007, Karoly, Reardon, and Cho authored a RAND Corporation study, “Early Care and Education in the Golden State,” regarding concerns about how early education in California was funded. Gaps in early elementary student academic achievement, the potentiality of high-quality early education programs decreasing such gaps, the complex funding web of early education, and the accessibility of and eligibility for these programs for all children in California were becoming more and more publicly discussed by politicians and educational stakeholders. “This project was requested by the California Governor’s Committee on Education Excellence, the California State Superintendent of Public Instruction, the Speaker of the California State

Assembly, and the President pro Tempore of the California State Senate” (Karloly, Reardon, & Cho, 2007, p. v).

One important question addressed by the authors of the RAND (2007) study and related to the problem addressed regarding TK teacher preparation in this research project was, “What requirements for service delivery are maintained for these programs (e.g., requirements for provider or teacher training, group sizes, and program services) and how do those requirements relate to benchmarks for high-quality programs?” (p. iv). Appropriate teacher preparation and high-quality program design, it appeared, were compromised by a lack of consistent and targeted funding resulting in a variety of challenges. “The system of publicly funded ECE programs that has evolved represents a complex set of programs that vary in terms of their objectives, eligibility requirements, the range of services provided and requirements for program features, and funding levels” (RAND, 2008, p. xv). Initiating a program for four-year olds (TK) in LEA settings circumvented the complex ECE funding structure in favor of the comparatively simplistic K–12 funding structure.

As an aside, LEAs, as with most other program implementation choices, will determine their own system of compliance and evidentiary information. LEAs will solely determine if teachers assigned to TK are “qualified.” Some may track the required 24 ECE/CD units, others may equate early education experience (teaching K–3) as compliance. At the time of this writing there is no standardized measurement of compliance nor does the CDE provide guidance on how document compliance.

Complexities of early childhood education. While interpretation of “Transforming the Workforce Birth to Eight” (TWB8) (2015) report by the Institute of Medicine (IOM) and National Research Council of the National Academies could provide volumes of current critical

information about early learning, teacher preparation, and child outcomes, it is this single statement that clearly addresses and affirms the notion of TK teacher preparation inadequacies:

The science of child development and early learning makes it clear how important and complex it is to work with children from infancy through the early elementary years. Yet despite their shared objective of nurturing and securing the future success of young children, those who provide for the care and education of children from birth through age 8 are *not acknowledged as a cohesive workforce, unified by the shared knowledge and competencies* [emphasis added] needed to do their jobs well. *Expectations for these professionals often have not kept pace with what the science indicates children need* [emphasis added] and many current policies do not place enough value on the significant contributions these professionals make to children’s long-term success. (Institute of Medicine of the National Academies Brief, 2015, p. 2)

Like the 2000 “From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development” discussed previously, the “Transforming the Workforce Birth Through Age 8” (2015), contributing researchers and technical experts brought an all-embracing and wide-reaching perspective on teacher DAP preparation. “Based on the shared foundation of child development and early learning, *all educators* [emphasis added] need to develop core competencies to move children along a trajectory of learning and developmental goals” (p. 360). Regardless of the entry path of educators, the research presented in the report clearly validate the need for educators at all levels to gain necessary, foundational, comprehensive knowledge of child development and early childhood education. Talking with teachers in this study assisted in understanding experiences with each of these elements, especially the domain social-emotional learning (SEL) whereby children are taught to set and achieve positive goals, feel and show

empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, make responsible decisions, and understand and manage emotions.

Being a member of the 14-member California Transforming the Workforce Birth to Eight (CA TWB8) (2015) Stewardship Group, I can share that insights regarding new teacher credentialing and permitting requirements are being introduced. A career lattice has been developed and will soon be finalized and indicates pathways by which ECE educators and those interested in pursuing ECE work can attain credits toward professional mobility. Additionally, the role of institutions of higher education (IHEs) in enhancing ECE preparation in both 2-year and 4-year IHE's are current topics of high-level conversation. Members of the CA TWB8 initiative will represent *every* sector of ECE; while the full team is still emerging, one can likely understand how complex the endeavor is, especially in a state as populated and complicated as California.

An organizational “constellation” map reflects this complexity of early childhood education in California. While California’s ECE constellation map is not yet ready for public viewing, readers may be interested in knowing that the concept was created by the Centre for Social Innovation (CSI) in Toronto. “The constellation model is a framework for effectively bringing diverse partners from multiple fields together to solve complex and pressing social problems” (The Glen Price Group, 2017, para. 8).

“Constellation-based partnerships are created in response to a specific need and are overseen by a stewardship group that provides lightweight governance. The stewardship group sets strategic direction, monitors the overall health of the partnership, and aligns constellations with the overarching goal” (The Glen Price Group, 2017, para. 5). For California, these partnerships include: EarlyEd U, the CA ECE Professional Learning Team, the Workforce

Registry, Partnerships in Education, Articulation, and Coordination through Higher Education (PEACH), the Telecommunications and Technology Advisory Committee, the Child Development Permit Advisory Panel, the State Advisory Council (SAC) on Early Learning and Care, the Department of Social Services, the Department of Health and Human Services, the Curriculum Alignment Project, California's version of the Quality Rating Improvement System known as Quality Counts California, California County Superintendents Educational Services Association (CCSESA), and many more who provide statewide leadership.

Current efforts are designed to create a true collaborative to help define future policies for ECE. Complexities of collaborative partnerships are sometimes presented in an electronic diagram format. An "Organizational Constellation Model" (Surman & Surman, 2008) is the model California is currently utilizing to ensure full collaboration and decision-making of all early childhood education stakeholders. The model diagram includes "constellations" represented by as many yellow-filled circles as necessary. The constellations (also identified as "Work Groups" in the current structure) are labeled by the variety of groups. In this case, a sampling of the Work Groups includes the ECE State Advisory Council Work Group, Curriculum Alignment Project (CAP) Work Group, Coaching Work Group, Child Development Permit Advisory Panel, Trainer and Trainer Approval Work Group, Training and Technical Assistance Collaborative (TTAC), and the Early EdU Alliance. *Many* other groups add additional constellations. In each constellation there are identified projects, work, or connections that need to be include. These are diagrammed as stars in each constellation and include elements such as funding, direct services, research, child health, formal early education, informal care, the ECE workforce, family engagement, and communication (again, this is a sampling not a complete list). Lead partners (currently the California Department of Education and First 5

California) oversee and facilitate the work of the constellations and are the primary members of the TWB8 Stewardship Group. To add to existing complexity, the model requires a color-code key to identify where the TWB8 Work Group, existing collaborations, groups to be established, subgroups, and constellation member organizations are included. Constellations conduct work simultaneously based on shared visions in a broader ecosystem of functionality. In order to make this work happen, a third partner provides coordination of all work. For California, the third partner is the Glen Price Group.

As indicated in California's TWB8 Implementation plan, "Professionals working with young children need specific knowledge and skills to help children learn and grow . . . professional requirements vary depending on funding, program type and age, and inconsistently measure what candidates should know or be able to do" (p. 3). Bringing professional development and professional learning experts together, proverbially and literally, at one table has been a significant challenge and a significant accomplishment. Dedication to the development of California's response to implementation plan of TWB8 has already been a three-year start up process with significant goals now collaboratively identified.

California-specific early learning foundations. With the understanding that children may not have been receiving equitable learning opportunities, the California Department of Education created foundations (known as "standards" in K–12 educational systems) to "provide *early childhood educators* [emphasis added], parents, and the public with a clear understanding of the wide range of knowledge and skills that *preschool children* [emphasis added] typically attain when given the benefits of a high-quality preschool program." The foundations were disseminated to non-LEA early childhood programs and became the basis for preschool teacher candidate preparation and on-the-job professional learning but were not targeted to LEA early

education teachers; many of whom were not yet engaged in providing ECE programs prior to teaching TK-aged children.

The foundations, as identified by California, “describe the knowledge, skills, and competencies that children typically attain at around 48 and 60 months of age when they participate in a high-quality preschool program and with adequate support” (California Department of Education, 2016, n.p.). Again, the terminology of 48 and 60 months as opposed to four and five years old, and preschool as opposed to TK, could have led LEA stakeholders to assume wrongly that the foundations were intended for a population different from traditional understanding of this age group. As discussed earlier, the silos of the ECE and K–12 realms continued even when the foundations were distributed. It was not until the 2012 legal precedence required all California LEAs who offered kindergarten to also provide TK with developmentally appropriate practice, that barriers in terminology were brought to the fore.

“The foundations define ‘destination points’ [not targets] for where children are going [developmentally] during this age range. They also inform practitioners about academic and social development so that decisions can be made to support children’s curriculum and growth” (California Department of Education, 2016, p. 33). The foundations were based on an asset module of development rather than the deficit module sometimes considered in LEAs. An asset model of development focuses on what a child can do (Blasi, 2002; Favela & Torres, 2014) rather than on what the child is not able to do based on prescribed and expected points of proficiency.

As stated by California State Superintendent of Public Instruction Torlakson “understanding of learning and development during the first five years [is directly correlated to the] preschool learning foundations, Common Core State Standards, California content standards

for kindergarten, and the Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework” (Torlakson as cited by California Department of Education, 2012, p. 6). The California Preschool Learning Foundations (PLF), providing the basis for TK instruction and program planning, are the equivalent of K–12 grade level standards that TK teachers and instructional leaders are required, by law, to know and understand Senate Bill 837 (Steinberg): “[Appropriated] moneys shall be allocated [to] strengthen teacher knowledge of the California Preschool Learning Foundations” (California Legislative Information, 2014). Educating pre-service educators, both teachers and administrators, about early education research and best practices, available resources, and sources of professional learning opportunities during service tenures will move California forward in providing her youngest learners with high-quality DAP.

Comparisons between early childhood education and K–12 teacher preparation.

Affirming what may now seem redundant, but worth repeating for the sake of future research on the problem presented in this study, is the notion of the divergent pathways of ECE teacher preparation and K–12 teacher preparation. Whitebook (2014) asserted in the TWB8 report: “Different standards and requirements are one of the major differences in the educational pathways, especially between those who teach in elementary school settings and those who teach in settings outside of elementary school systems” (p. 366). Studies within this report are new contributions to the field of education and clearly address the disconnection between educational communities. Additionally, “legislative changes reflect that the creation of TK was not part of the larger comprehensive coordinated systems-level reform initiative” (Nicholson et al., 2018, p. 29).

It may be wrongly assumed then, as already established, that PS/K–8 credentialed teachers have the knowledge, disposition, and expertise needed at each of the 10 levels of formal

elementary (Early et al., 2006). Middle school students in seventh and eighth grade are developmentally different from early elementary students in Grade 1 and Grade 2. Students in Grade 5 and Grade 6 grade have different developmental needs from their counterparts in high school. Recognizably, then, children in early education settings such as preschool, TK, and K present with unique developmental competences that separate them from all other grades and ages (Buchanan, Burts, Bidner, White, & Charlesworth, 1998; Liu, 2007). While engaging in professional learning during employment may improve teacher proficiencies (Reeves, 2010), it is preparation programs that are the foundation of credential issuance. Framing the current study problem with inclusion of teacher preparation research at both the ECE and LEA levels assisted in framing interview questions.

Considering that administrators must sometimes make decisions to reassign teachers (Ost & Schiman, 2015), it should be clear that K–8 Multiple Subject credentialed teachers do not, in fact, have the preparation and skills necessary to move expertly between the grades. Considering that teachers sometimes accept positions to teach an unfamiliar grade is of concern when considering the developmental needs of children assigned them.

So even they [policy-makers] believe it may be best to have “two separate licenses – prekindergarten through Grade 3 and another license that begins around Grades 3 and 4 and goes into middle school” many administrators and teacher educator students do not approve of this split as it yields less flexibility. Currently, an administrator may need a teacher to teach pre-K one year and the next year he/she may need that same professional to teach 4th Grade. If licensing was changed it would severely restrict the autonomy administrators believe they need to move teachers from grade to grade. (Bournfreund, as cited by Kohler, Christensen, & Kilgo, 2012)

Based on this conceptual framework, boundaries of the study were established. Child academic outcomes, longitudinal review of outcomes between children who attended TK and those who did not, teacher demographics of gender, age, ethnicity, race, county of employment, and early childhood education and K–12 preparation programs in other states were not studied. Additionally, factors such as single grade and combination class configurations, average child:teacher ratios (31:4 for LEAs and 12:1 for non-LEA licensed preschools), parent involvement, part- or full-day program configurations, adopted curriculum and the like, are not included in this study.

While the K–12 system focused on the politics and outcomes of grade level standards and instructional implications for teachers in classrooms, the ECE system focused on *Neurons to Neighborhood* national recommendations which led to a system-wide focus on workforce preparation practices. A sampling of research topics represents the difference in emphases between ECE in non-LEA settings and LEA settings. Using search terms of “ECE preparation for non-LEA early education workforce” and “teacher preparation for LEA instructional staff” provided a comparative sampling of research topics during the *Neurons to Neighborhoods* drafting, dissemination, and review period presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Sampling of California ECE and K–12 Teacher Preparation Topics 2000–2008

Year	ECE Teacher Preparation Topics	K–12 Teacher Preparation Topics
2000	Preparing the Workforce: Early Childhood Teacher Preparation at 2- and 4-year IHE (Early and Winton)	Science Teacher Preparation (Borowiec and James)
2000	New Teachers for a New Century: The Future of Early Childhood Professional Preparation (U.S. Department of Education)	Emerging Certifications and Teacher Preparation (Andersen)
2001	Providing the Scaffold: A Model for Early Childhood/Primary Teacher Preparation (Jacobs)	Challenge of Foreign Language Teacher Preparation: Addressing State Teacher Standards (Sullivan & Hammadou)
2001	Preparing the Workforce (U.S. Department of Education)	Reform in Music Teacher Preparation (Bidner)
2003	Effective Preparation for ECE: What Does North American Research Tell Us? (Kontos and Wilcox – Herzog)	Developing a Learning Community for Technology Infusion in Teacher Preparation (Resta, Allen, and Noonan)
2004	Mentoring for Quality Improvement: A Case Study of a Mentor Teacher in the Reform Process (Ryan and Hornbeck)	Digital Portfolios in Physical Education Teacher Preparation (Horton)
2005	Shifting from Developmental to Postmodern Practices in ECE Teacher Education (Ryan & Grieshaber)	Mentoring: A New Approach to Geography Teacher Preparation (Bednarz, Witham, Bockenhauer, & Walk)
2006	Linking Research to Best Practice: University Laboratory Schools in Early Childhood Education (Harms & Tracy)	International Reports on Literacy Research: Teacher Preparation (Botzakis, Stergios, and Malloy)
2007	What We Know about Integrating ECE and Special Education Teacher Preparation Programs (Piper)	Changing Teacher Preparation in Art Education (Henry and Lazzari)
2008	The Efficacy of Personal Learning Plans in Early Childhood Teacher Preparation (Malone)	Reorganizing Teacher Preparation in Deaf Education (Humphries and Allen)

Notably, early education teacher preparation topics appeared to focus on pedagogy while K–12 local education teacher preparation seemed to focus on content and accountability. This highlights the differences in professional preparation focus as well as the gap in research for TK teachers in LEA settings and contextualizes both research and educational priorities of the time. Early childhood educators, specifically K teachers, were provided with LEA preparation specific to curricular areas (i.e. science, technology, geography) rather than ECE developmentally appropriate practices and approaches toward learning (i.e. professional preparation, mentoring, personal learning).

Conferences, workshops, and other on-the-job professional learning opportunities notwithstanding, it appears that TK teachers have had relatively limited preparation to teach this specialized level (Baron, 2014; Silva, 2016) compared to early education colleagues in non-LEA settings (Early & Winton, 2001; Gomez, Kagan, & Fox, 2015; National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2013). While on-the-job training, also known as informal training, may be crucial in improving teacher quality especially for novice teachers (Grosemans, Boon, Verclairen, Dochy, & Kyndt, 2014), it is understood that 4-year preparation programs bear the responsibility of instructing teacher candidates about pedagogy and research-based knowledge of teaching and learning. The content of these preparation programs has direct correlation to credentialing and legislative requirements and provide a key frame for interview-based discussion. Knowing what teachers understand about their own preparation experiences will inform key decision-makers about legislative intent and classroom actualities.

As suggested by Early and Winton (2001) “challenges may limit higher-education’s ability to meet the increased demand for well-trained early childhood professionals and may suggest a need for restructuring or expansion of the current early childhood teacher preparation

system” (p. 288). Similarly, Spitler (2001) suggested that “another higher education barrier is that our system of higher education fails to ensure a common core of professional knowledge” (p. 21). However, not only was restructuring of higher education preparatory programs suggested, but so too were outright condemnations of early education preparation including: “the United States is failing its young children by continuing to tolerate a system of early education and professional preparation that is inadequate to the task of helping all children develop and succeed as they should” (Hyson, 2001, p. 60).

During the same five-year period following *Neurons to Neighborhoods*, early education researchers became even more heavily focused on brain development. “By emphasizing that early processes of brain development are qualitatively different from later stages, for example, they have drawn attention to the unique developmental opportunities and vulnerabilities of early childhood” (Thompson & Nelson, 2001). This focus did not take on a new direction, but rather was a response to media dissemination of research knowledge regarding child development, parenting practices, and educational pedagogy.

Likewise, specific strands of brain development caught the attention of scholars. For instance, “Mutual self-other-consciousness is found to play the lead role in developing a child’s cooperative intelligence for cultural learning and language” (Trevvarthen & Aitken, 2001, p. 1) and “Findings point in the direction of effects of early maternal pregnancy stress on the fetal brain, resulting in attention and concentration problems in childhood and adolescence” (Gutteling, de Weerth, Zandbelt, Mulder, Visser & Buitelaar, 2006, p. 796) and “By relating patterns of brain activation to observed behavioral differences, we find a steady decrease in cortical activation sub-serving self-regulation across childhood” (Lewis, Granic, & Lamm, 2016, p. 164). From emotional development to pregnancy stress to behavior, social science researchers

were contributing to existing fields of study related to early childhood and to future TK research and the preparation teachers needed to facilitate high levels of learning in young children; however, TK had not yet entered formal education officialdoms.

Brain development, in context of early childhood educator professional preparation, has been proven to be essential. “Teachers who have studied how young children learn and develop and effective ways of teaching them are more likely to have this specialized knowledge” (NAEYC, 2009, p. 5). Additionally, precise understanding of effective modes of teaching includes application of “DAP [which] is informed by what we know from theory and literature about how children develop and learn” (NAEYC, 2009, p. 10). Well before TK, early education proponents including scholars, researchers from various perspectives and fields, and experienced educators were augmenting existing research regarding teacher preparation, academic qualifications, and minimal standards of professionalism.

While experience in teaching kindergarten expectedly provides some knowledge of children near the TK age group, experience alone may be inadequate and thus unfortunate for children currently in this age group in LEAs. “Considerable research has shown that, while teachers continue to value teaching experience as a way to learn, experience alone does not guarantee the preparation of more expert teachers” (Schmidt, 2010, p. 142). While TK is aligned with California’s K standards and is taught by credentialed teachers from the K–8 system, current programs may be a diluted version of traditional K rather than a program with nuanced and intentional practices aimed at meeting the unique developmental needs of TK children.

Review of Methodological Issues

As an analytical research project, the National Research Council (NRC) and the Institute of Medicine (IOM) of the National Academies (2000) released *From Neurons to Neighborhoods*:

The Science of Early Childhood Development, which synthesized current scientific knowledge of child development from birth to age five. This approach yielded expert study and analysis of “an explosion of research in the neurobiological, behavioral, and social sciences” (p. 1). While on a much smaller scale, a similar approach was used in this investigation to identify quantitative findings regarding TK educator preparation and the instructional experiences.

Similarly, in 2015 the NRC and the IOM group were charged with a *Neurons* follow-up research study to “focus on the implications of the science of development and early learning for care and education professionals who work with children from birth through age 8” (p. 2). Supporting the notion that development does not occur in specified stages, the authors of the previously discussed “Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation” (2015) asserted “[development] falls on a continuum that encompasses individual variations in development [which] begins before birth and continues after age 8 into the rest of childhood and beyond” and that there is a “troubling disconnect between the particularly disjointed nature of the systems that serve them” (p. 2). Informal discussions between this researcher and report editors Dr. LaRue Allen and Dr. Bridget Kelly and contributing author, Dr. Albert Wat in 2015 validated the NRC’s and the IOM’s commitment to directly supporting the early childhood professional preparation systems of California.

Methodologically, research conducted by American Institute of Research (AIR) in 2015 used quantitative study strategies. Surveys of 200 participating LEA TK teachers were collected and 184 California LEA TK classroom observations were conducted. Quantitative examination of the number of full-day and part-day programs, enrollment statistics, class sizes and student:teacher ratios, classroom configuration type (combination classes and stand-alone

classes), instructional strategies, and child demographics provided the basis for findings in review of the new phenomenon of TK in California.

As a public policy research organization, the RAND Corporation (2009) investigated issues related to *Preschool Adequacy and Efficiency in California*. Study author, Karoly (2009), extracted data and findings from three interrelated studies conducted by RAND.

Methodologically, the study developed as Ex Post Facto to validate and expand upon previous findings concluding that “it is vital that preschool programs be considered as part of a continuum of services designed to prepare children for kindergarten and to ensure their success in school and beyond” (Karoly, 2009, p. 19).

Ritchie, Lewis, McNaughton, Nicolls, and Ormston (2013) “define qualitative research in terms of what it is not, drawing contrasts with the aims and methods of quantitative research in general” (p. 3). Within the parameters of qualitative research design are multiple philosophies and theories from which a researcher must choose and commit to during the process of the study design. Revealing the justification for inclusion or exclusion of particular research processes establishes validity and believability (Willis, 2007). An understanding of what developmentally appropriate practice is and how such practice is understood and implemented by educators is directly related to several educational and theoretical frameworks in addition to development of the study framework.

Henry et al. (2013) used a quantitative approach in attempting to determine the relationship between teacher preparation and teacher effectiveness by “assess[ing] the predictive validity of measures in one teacher preparation program [and analyzing] data on grades, professional behaviors and dispositions, performance assessments, Praxis I exam scores, and portfolios of candidates’ work to study as potential predictors of effectiveness” (p. 439). Mixed

methodology has been used in the study of teacher preparedness and teacher implementation of DAP as well and was supported by Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) when contending that “epistemological and methodological pluralism should be promoted in educational research so that researchers are informed about epistemological and methodological possibilities and, ultimately, so that we are able to conduct more effective research” (p. 2).

Conversely, authors Hallam, Chou, Hite, and Hite (2012) employed a qualitative approach and a purposive stratified sampling model when looking at mentoring paradigms for new teachers. As discussed by the authors, the inability to retain new teachers presents “threats to stability of educational organizations in the United States” and “stands to affect the quality of instruction and student learning” (p. 244). The purposive stratified sampling examination of the effects of mentoring allowed the researchers to “[examine] two distinct mentoring models” (p. 249). From the sample of teachers in the state, the participant sample was stratified to include the two model from which the authors could draw comparative conclusions.

Surveys, interviews, interest groups; these are methods by which many researchers have sought to learn more about educator preparation, educator knowledge, and educator readiness to address the needs of students. It may also, then, be of little surprise that observations of classroom instruction using data color-coded categorization areas, observations of adult collaborative interactions using video recordings, and observations of teacher work habits in the review of documents created by and for teachers have been standardized (Saldaña, 2008). Such qualitative research designs work well in educational research studies of human behavior, understanding of personal choices, and identifying personal dispositions; such designs work well as they draw information directly from relevant sources and provide researchers with

opportunities to deeply explore a topic of interest. However, other methodologies have also been exercised in educational, psychological, and social fields.

Other researchers have used mixed methods approaches. Eckert's (2012) study focused on inequitable distribution of highly effective teachers and the common practice of local education agencies employing teachers based on "preparation-related credentials highlighted by the federal government such as certification, test scores, and the amount of coursework completed" (p. 1) rather than quality of the preparation program. While primarily studied through qualitative protocol, scholarly literature on the topics of teacher preparation and DAP have also been investigated through quantitative and mixed methodological approaches. For example, Speedie (2016) using qualitative protocol, concluded that "studies have shown that teachers with higher levels of education were more likely to implement DAP" (p. 20).

In the final analysis of justification for the choice of methodology protocol employed, researchers must be aware of internal motivation. "While there may be difficulty for the [educational] researcher to understand and disentangle underlying motives during the research process with different, easily conflicting research positions, resources, quality rules, time frames, audiences, and products" (Akkerman, Bronkhorst, & Zitter, 2013, p. 1), educational researchers, like all scholarly researchers must carefully consider the problem of focus, the research plan, and the best means by which to analyze and present findings. "The quantitative and qualitative methods used in this study complemented each other" (Klopfer & Squire, 2008, as cited by Anderson & Shattuck, 2012, p. 8). In this case, mixed methodology had an accepted study review outcome. Returning to a previously stated notion that researchers must choose protocol fitting for individual knowledge and research competency, mixed research methodology pursuits should not be chosen lightly. "Researchers can be ill-equipped to make decisions about how and

when to integrate the qualitative and quantitative components of mixed methods research” (Yardley & Bishop, 2014, p. 3) potentially resulting in faulty findings.

Synthesis of Research Findings

Synthesis of research discussed to this point, contributes to understanding the expanse of the research problem and the differences in focus specific to educational entities. Preparation of non-LEA ECE educators has been primarily focused on pedagogy while preparation of LEA ECE educators has primarily focused on content-specific preparation (Anderson, 2016; California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 2016; Early & Winton, 2001; Horm, Hyson, & Winton, 2013; Hyson, Biggar, Tomlinson, & Morris, 2009; Kennedy & Heineke, 2014; Kohler, Christensen, & Kilgo, 2012; Maniates, 2016; Silva & Fong, 2016; Soria, 2016; Stover, 2013; Whitebook, Austin, Ryan, Kipnis, Almaraz, & Sakai, 2012). There may be the need for child development and early childhood education pedagogy to be equivalently included in preparation programs for those in both ECE and LEA settings.

Neurology, brain development research, child cognition and social-emotional development also contribute to and must be the basis of educator preparation programs as well as facilitation of intentional play opportunities coalesced with developmentally appropriate practice (Avan & Kirkwood, 2010; Bornstein, 2006; Brown & Mawry, 2015; Carpendale & Lewis, 2004; File & Gullo, 2002; Heidbreder, 1940; Lee & Johnson, 2007; Maynard, La Paro, & Johnson, 2014; Priest, McConnell, Walker, & Carta, 2008; Vartuli & Rohs, 2009; Westermann, Mareschal, Johnson, Sirois, Spratling, & Thomas, 2006).

Lack of educational parity in teacher quality may lead to negative societal impacts (AIR, 2016; Burchinal, Pianta, Bryant, Early, Clifford, & Barbarin, 2006; Henry, Campbell, Thompson, Patriarca, Luterbach, & Lys, 2013; Macken, 2013; Steinberg, 2014; Ward, Grudnoff, Brooker, &

Simpson, 2011). Legislative action, governmental interests, credentialing configurations, and even the unique vocabulary and terminology of educator preparation systems (Goe & Stickler, 2008; Perie, 2008; Pufpaff, 2009; Sarama & Clements, 2001; Steinberg, 2014) may cause undue complexity to the problem of preparing LEA educators to provide high-quality TK programs in California.

While the previous synthesis of research findings was *related* to the study problem and questions, they did not provide insights into transitional kindergarten educator preparation and later program implementation confidence. To critique equivalent research, equivalent research must be available. Using the search term “transitional kindergarten” yielded disconnected research topics mostly related to transition *to* kindergarten. Studies that have been conducted regarding TK are few. In fact, as the date of this review twelve terminal degree research projects have been conducted. Of those twelve, five were financially supported by the David and Lucille Packard Foundation. “The Foundation Ed.D. Fellowship Program was begun in 2010–11. Doctoral students in educational leadership conducted dissertation and pre-dissertation research practice pertaining to TK, ECE after-school and summer learning, and pathways for after-school staff into teaching” (California State University, 2016, para. 1. This focus from Packard as a leading educational, philanthropic organization highlights the need for peer-reviewed scholarly studies related to TK and teacher proficiency.

The results of equivalent research projects indicate that emerging research, with findings still to be vetted, will provide new information about TK policy, program implementation, developmentally appropriate approaches to teaching, child development (CD), learning environments in LEAs as well as information about TK teacher preparedness and instructional practices, and research-based protocol. Herota (2013) used qualitative interviewing to study TK

program implementation approaches as a dissertation focus. In 2014, Baron studied DAP in TK using mixed methodology including surveys. In 2015, three dissertations focused on TK including O'Brien's mixed method study of TK child behavior regarding social emotional development, Cvijetic's ex post facto quantitative study of outcomes of TK English language learners, and Nunez-Pineda's qualitative interview study conducted on the topic of the lack of TK research. Bauman (2015) authored an article on gun play in TK and used qualitative protocol to conduct the study.

More recently, Fong (2016) and Henderson (2016) used qualitative observation and qualitative interviewing (respectively) to study the impact of the lack of TK research on TK policy. Focused on different topics in the same year, Soria (2016) and Silva (2016) completed dissertation work using qualitative interviews to study K–12 administrator's perceptions of TK and teacher preparedness (respectively). Likewise, Arbizzi (2016) and Aguilar (2016) chose qualitative interview and observation approaches to study TK approaches and TK Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math programs (respectively) to complete thesis projects.

Synthesis of the key elements of the Conceptual Framework provides an overall understanding of findings of the past decade. Specifically, synthesis of research related to the *Researcher Dispositions* element of the conceptual framework emphasized the need for researchers, stakeholders, decision-makers, and policy developers to consider the needs of children first. The work of Walker, Kutsyuruba, and Bishop-Yong (2011) addressed the concept of “best interests” in a multiethical framework. This Canadian study looked deeply at the importance of moral and ethical considerations related to focusing on the “what is best for children” notion. While on a surface level this may be perceived as simplistic, it is in fact, the opposite as doing what is best for children is exceptionally complicated.

McMahon and McGannon (2015) made clear to readers that findings on the topic of researcher dispositions was not conclusive or absolute, but that the findings did reveal a cross section of differing understandings. Researcher encounters resulting in living, breathing, emotional and sensory experiences resulted in discussion of narrative inquiry approaches to research. Supporting the idea of revealing the individual dispositions of researchers, the authors opined that the experiences are just as important as academic aptitude (McMahon & McGannon, 2015).

Ragland and Ebner's 2006 article on transformative experiential learning was developed and based on a 3-year study with educational partners in the Chicago area including Waukegan, Illinois School District #60 (identified as a "high need school district"), Lake Forest College, and the Chicago Historical Society. The preliminary needs assessment revealed that "what the teachers did in the classroom were not research-supported practices," (p. 8) but rather were utilized based on existing teacher dispositions. Ragland and Ebner (2006) concluded that the 20 study participants changed personal perspectives and suggested that "further research and analysis of the project's outcomes will reveal more about the [experiential] factors that contributed to changes" (p. 8) in instructional strategies.

Synthesis of research related to the *Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Education* element of the conceptual framework begins with a 2014 study. Over a ten-year period, Walsh et al. (2014) studied high-poverty elementary schools and tracked a sampling of 7,948 kindergarten to fifth-grade students in a large urban district during 1999–2009 indicated that at-risk children who enter public school without targeted and early intervention may experience a continuum of low proficiency outcomes. The quasi-experimental study of longitudinal effects examined barriers to learning in high-poverty, urban elementary schools in

the Boston Public School system and claimed that “every child’s strengths and needs across multiple domains is predicted to change teachers’ instruction by deepening what they know about their students” (Walsh et al., 2014, p. 708). This is supportive of the requirement of DAP for young children.

Focusing on poverty and instructionally appropriate practices in five major cities addressing the concerns from decision-makers in Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, and New York City, Leventhal, Fauth, and Brooks-Gunn (2005) found that school quality (including teacher instructional quality) may outweigh other effects on child outcomes. Improving low-income children’s educational outcomes involve multiple dynamics, including school and classroom practices. The study revealed the complexity of effecting change in children’s well-being with plausible merit. The primary investigation study problem spotlighted the outcome of voucher systems and applies, albeit remotely to poverty and instructional practices.

Research synthesis by Mcewen and Stewart (2014), though not an individual, empirical study, resulted in evidence and claims that support the study at hand regarding DAP, especially for young children with risk factors such as poverty. Focused on Canadian research, the authors amalgamated institutional policies, family income, child outcomes, and qualitative indicators of a child’s status and development to determine effects of indicators. Summarizing the intended synthesis by stating “Addressing inequalities in childhood, which create unequal chances for success later in life, will require policy that tackles more than only income as a source of disadvantage” (p. 100) including the *causes* of child outcomes such as DAP and DIP.

Next, synthesis of current research related to the Conceptual Framework element *California-Specific K–8 Teacher Preparation and Credentialing* presented reports regarding teacher preparation. First, the AIR (2015) report, “The Impact of Transitional Kindergarten on

Kindergarten Readiness” with funding from the Heising-Simons Foundation, the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, and First 5 California readily suggested that “despite some *inconsistent findings* [emphasis added], there is evidence that teachers’ level of education and teacher pay are both positively related to student outcomes.” Additionally, Manship et al. (2015) co-researcher and author indicated “it is important to note that this study reports results for one cohort of students—those participating in the second year of the rollout of TK” (p. iv) and “we hypothesize that TK teachers, being well educated and better compensated than most preschool teachers, *may* [emphasis added] help their students achieve better school readiness outcomes” (p. 2). The operative word “may” is disconcerting when considering the enormity of program impact for children in the cohorts of consideration. The authors admit “researchers and educators disagree about the right balance of academic and nonacademic content in kindergarten” (Manship et al., 2015, p. 2), debates that extend to TK as well. The report primarily focuses on child age eligibility for TK and assessment data:

Students who attended TK had more advanced literacy, mathematics, and executive function skills at kindergarten entry than did their peers who did not attend TK. The advantage conferred by TK participation was up to approximately five months of learning. At kindergarten entry, students who attended TK were up to half a school year ahead of peers who did not attend TK. (Manship et al., 2015, p. 11)

The Conceptual Framework element regarding teacher preparation was also addressed in the AIR report which further indicated that “Future analyses will investigate the extent to which the transitional kindergarten advantage is sustained through the end of kindergarten, for which groups of students [TK] is most beneficial, and which [TK] program characteristics are most supportive of student learning” (p. iv). TK can provide an early academic advantage for some

children; however, improving preliteracy and literacy skills is only a portion of the advantage of TK. “Transitional kindergarten improves students’ mathematical knowledge and problem-solving skills. Transitional kindergarten supports children’s behavioral self-regulation, but there is *no detectable impact on social-emotional skills* [emphasis added]” (Manship et al., 2015, p. ii) as indicated in the findings.

An earlier (2008) 230-page RAND Corporation study “Early Care and Education in the Golden State” was based on four case-study counties in Los Angeles, Merced, San Diego, and San Mateo. The project, requested by the California Governor’s Committee on Education Excellence, the California State Superintendent of Public Instruction, the Speaker of the California State Assembly, and the President pro Tempore of the California State Senate was funded by the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, W. K. Kellogg Foundation, the Pew Charitable Trusts through the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER), the W. Clement and Jessie V. Stone Foundation, and Los Angeles Universal Preschool (LAUP), validated California’s dedication to subsidize early education in non-LEA settings.

As indicated in the report “state preschool programs are required to offer comprehensive educational-based activities that are *developmentally* [emphasis added], linguistically, and culturally appropriate” (Manship et al., 2015, p. 17). Knowing that the many report contributors are now my colleagues, the claims and merit of the report are without reproach. Additionally, the report identifies development of training for the Preschool Learning Foundations (comprehensive early learning standards/PLFs), the Child Development Staff Retention Program (otherwise known as “AB 212” or Assembly Bill 212, of which I am currently the contract monitor) which provides stipends to allow child development staff working directly with children to maintain their child development permits and complete college degrees. Using state and federal funds, the

California Department of Education (CDE) funds Local Planning Councils in all of California's 58 counties (of which I am currently contract monitor of) that distribute funds locally.

Synthesizing report content in a single statement "education requirements fall short" for ECE teachers heightens the need for a coordinated effort to expand and enhance educational outcomes for those working with young children.

Transitioning next to the Conceptual Framework element related to the California Preschool Learning Foundations (PLFs), Blasi (2002) supported California's approach to implementing an asset model of development focused on what a child can do. "[understand] children and families to be 'of promise' rather than 'at risk'" (p. 106). When reviewing the introductory PLF Volume, stakeholders are provided an outline of "research-based competencies—knowledge and skills—that most children can be expected to exhibit in a high-quality program. In other words, the foundations describe what all young children typically learn with appropriate support" (CA Preschool Learning Foundations, Volume 1, 2010, p. xi). "What all children will learn" is reflective of the belief that using existing assets produces much higher levels of proficiency than focusing identification and remediation of deficits.

Synthesis of research related to "Comparisons Between Early Childhood Education and Transitional Kindergarten" begins with Early, Bryant, Pianta, Clifford, Burchinal, Ritchie, Howes et al. (2006) in their study of "teachers' education, major, and credentials related to classroom quality and children's academic gains in pre-kindergarten" (p. 1). While student outcome assessments such as the Woodcock-Johnson Tests of Achievement, Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, and the Oral and Written Language Scale were applied, of greater interest to the study at hand were the outcomes of global classroom effectiveness assessments; the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-Revised (ECERS-R) and the Classroom Assessment

Scoring System (CLASS). The authors did not find a difference in outcomes for children when they were taught by teachers who did and did not have bachelor's degrees.

Next, Buchanan, Burts, Bidner, White, and Charlesworth (1998) looked at the practices and beliefs of first, second, and third grade teachers ($n = 277$). Participants completed and returned The Primary Teacher's Beliefs and Practices Survey, a tool based on developmentally appropriate standards advocated by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). Researchers focused on the implementation of DAP and DIP in both teacher beliefs and selected instructional activities. While classroom characteristics (i.e.: class size, grade level configuration, number of children receiving free or reduced lunch, special education status, etc.) contributed to implementation of DAP or DIP, the authors found that "teacher characteristics (perceived relative influence and area of certification) predicted teacher beliefs and practices" (p. 459). Interestingly, the authors contended even then (1998) that:

Little research has focused on the beliefs and practices of primary teachers concerning developmentally appropriate practice. This area of research is becoming important as early childhood educators attempt to facilitate continuity between preschool/kindergarten and the primary grades by advocating the extension of developmentally appropriate practice to primary grades. (Buchanan, Burts, Bidner, White, & Charlesworth, 1998, p. 2)

Included in Buchanan et al.'s, (1998) research were references to the research work of Dr. Peter Mangione. Inclusion of Mangione's work to the study presented by Buchanan et al. conveys a high level of validity to the findings as well as a level of disappointment that DAP has yet to be fully acknowledged or adopted by early elementary LEA settings. Mangione, currently the Co-Director of WestEd's Center for Child and Family Studies, oversees a contract with the CDE to develop a Curriculum Reflection Protocol for early education. The final product will be

marketed to both those in non-LEA and LEA settings to empower early educators to carefully analyze curricular tools, methods, and approaches which fully support DAP.

Continuing the discussion of “Comparisons Between Early Childhood Education and Transitional Kindergarten” research synthesis, Grosemans, Boon, Verclairen, Dochy, and Kyndt’s (2014) research of teacher culture convincingly asserted “the difference in findings between the quantitative and qualitative part could be due to the fact that interviews provided richer descriptions” (p. 159) than other methodology. Somewhat worrying was the finding that “[established as opposed to novice] teachers indicated that they valued their autonomy and also wanted to work out their problems by themselves” (p. 159). This may not bode well for TK children who may have [established] teachers who may prefer instructional experimentation rather than trying something new to them, such as research-based DAP relative to four-year olds.

Early and Winton proposed, in a 2001 study entitled “Preparing the Workforce: Early Childhood Teacher Preparation at 2- and 4-Year Institutions of Higher Education,” that accurate baseline data regarding ECE degrees, faculty competence, review of coursework and practica experiences, as well as comparative analysis of ECE program variables and challenges presented to faculty members be considered purposeful resulting in authentic recommendations regarding ECE preparation. Methodology included a national sampling of over 1,300 IHEs with a stratified random sample of 600. Questionnaires were completed by 438 IHE representatives. The study discussion validated previous statements in the current study, specifically that:

Having teachers qualified to teach a broad age range has some benefits. It makes an administrator’s job easier because staff can be moved easily to meet varying enrollment demands and it may provide teachers with employment flexibility. However, it may be a

disservice to the children in those settings if teachers lack specific training to work with their age group. (Early & Winton, 2001, p. 14)

An analysis of the evidence, claims, and concepts presented in the study include understanding the notion that “early childhood educators can obtain advanced degrees and move up the career ladder, eventually becoming faculty members. Making sure that career pathways are clear and unobstructed is critical” (p. 18) has been the foundation of linking IHE articulation and transfer of credits which will build ECE capacity (Early & Winton, 2011). Such pathways ensure that those interested in moving to other ECE positions are given related opportunities.

Schmidt (2010) utilized qualitative methodology when looking at the preservice, preparational experiences of six study participants. One-hour, recorded interviews were conducted and transcribed. Peer teaching, required student teaching experiences, and other field experiences were included in interview prompts and questions. Finding that the previous professional experiences of educators does not equate to expertise, the author admittedly indicated that his role as supervisor may have affected how participants responded.

Studying “Grade-Specific Experience, Grade Reassignments, and Teacher Turnover,” Ost and Schiman (2015) reviewed data from the North Carolina Education Research Data Center, which followed every public-school teacher in North Carolina from 1995 to 2007. When considering the Conceptual Framework of the current study, findings related to moving a teacher from one grade level to another ring true. “One reason that grade reassignments may cause turnover is if teachers are insufficiently prepared to teach a new grade. To the extent that this preparation is important, the relationship between turnover and grade reassignments could differ by teacher quality” (p. 120). While teacher turnover was a primary focus of the investigation, Ost

and Schiman suggested in the study that “stable teaching assignments tend to improve teacher value added” (p. 120).

Likewise, Liu’s (2007) survey-based study looked at teacher turnover. Per the author’s findings, teacher turnover in America is measured at approximately 14% which is higher than other professions. Quoting Dr. Linda Darling-Hammond, Liu (2007) suggested the need for focused attention on turnover when writing “Schools are always fighting an uphill battle to staff classrooms with qualified teachers” (p. 114). This statement directly correlates to the current study and is credible for various reasons. First, Liu (2007), utilized data from the “Teacher Follow-Up Survey” with over 2,600 former teachers. With 16 potential steps that could be taken to decrease turnover percentages, teachers identified pay, lack of professional advancement opportunities, and discipline problems as top contenders for impacting change. Liu’s (2007) methodology used uncomplicated statistical analysis and weighted survey responses according to years of teaching experience.

A 2016 study by Lewis, Granic, and Lamm focused on the importance of emotional self-regulation in children. Supporting the concept of teacher understanding of social-emotional development, the authors describe in detail “harmful patterns of interpersonal behavior at home and in the schoolyard” (Lewis, Granic, & Lamm, 2006, p. 164). Understanding how children develop socially and emotionally, providing redirection and intervention, identifying anomalies in the spectrum of aggressive behavior, and being cognizant of “the interplay among biological, psychological, and social factors” (Lewis, Granic, & Lamm, 2006, p. 164) study authors concluded that “developmentalists are increasingly interested in refining and testing models of brain-behavior relations that can help explain individual differences in socioemotional development in general and childhood psychopathology in particular” (p. 175). Considering the

current societal and political climate of older adolescents, young adults, and adults behaving in aggressive manners, this study is significant. Teachers, as front-line observers of children's behavior, are in a unique position to access intervening measures *if* they are knowledgeable about brain development and social-emotional learning. Using perturbation intended to increase emotional pressure and an emotional induction process intended to mimic emotional pressure, brain responses (cortical activation) of 58 children ages 5–16 were collected and analyzed.

Directly correlated to the current study, Silva (2016) suggested “teachers’ *feelings of preparedness* [emphasis added] are important indicators of whether or not they are prepared to meet the challenges that go hand in hand with the profession” (p. 8) was based on non-probability convenience survey sampling of 17 study participants. Using a Likert scale, Silva (2016) asked, in part: How adequately prepared do you feel to teach TK in language arts, math, physical development? How prepared to you feel to assess learning and growth of TK students? Do you feel clear about the learning theories you are expected to utilize? How adequately prepared to you feel to implement DAP? These survey questions addressed Silva’s (2016) first (of three) research questions: “To what extent do participants perceive they are prepared to teach in a Transitional Kindergarten class?” (p. 98). Like the current study, Silva opined that “The implementation of transitional kindergarten into California’s public-school districts was executed quickly without clear guidelines or training for teachers” (p. 97).

Of most significance in the course of this literature review has been identifying the important interstices in the study of LEA TK educator preparation and later program implementation confidence. Previous TK research is virtually non-existent (barring twelve current dissertations) due to the novelty of TK in California. The connections of general professional preparation of ECE and LEA educators has so far dominated this investigation. Additionally, the

content of educator preparation programs and the inclusion of research-based best practices including knowing about child development and learning, knowing what is individually appropriate, and knowing what is culturally important as identified in scholarly reports from NRC/IOM, AIR, NAEYC, NAESP, and individual scholars do not sufficiently address the concerns of educator preparation to teach in TK classrooms and programs.

Synthesis of peer-reviewed research identified in this chapter presents, however, a picture of high-quality methodological design, purpose, and impact. State and nationally commissioned reports on various topics related but not identical to the research problem have survived intense scrutiny and gained approval at prominent levels of educational, psychological, and social science disciplines. Importantly, the NRC/IOM in *Neurons to Neighborhoods* asserted that:

It is the strong conviction of this committee that the nation has not capitalized sufficiently on the knowledge that has been gained from nearly half a century of considerable public investment in research on children from birth to age 5. In many respects, we have barely begun to use existing science and our growing research capabilities to help children and families negotiate the changing demands and possibilities of life in the 21st century.

(National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2000, p. 2)

Likewise, authors of *Transforming the Workforce for Children Birth Through Age 8: A Unifying Foundation* asserted:

The committee finds that much is known about what professionals who provide education for children need to know and be able to do and what professional learning supports they need. However, that knowledge is not fully reflected in the current capacities and practices of the workforce, the settings in which they work, the policies and infrastructure that set qualifications and provide professional learning, and the

government and other funders who support and oversee these systems. (National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2000, p. 1)

Extracting the primary research problem from multiple influences and competing study interests is not without challenge, however, understanding how teachers perceive application of DAP instructional and environmental strategies in their own classrooms is a beginning of a multifaceted research agenda.

Critique of Research Findings

Analyzing the work of Walker, Kutsyruba, and Bishop-Yong (2011) led to positive critiquing of research addressing the concept of “best interests” in a multi ethical framework. The 132 respondents from throughout Canada provided input regarding ethical duties and responsibilities, human decency, professionalism, respect, jurisprudence, and individual rights. Supported by a grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, the authors provided concrete evidence to support the claim of the importance of moral and ethical consideration of the best interests of student(s) is moral imperative.

Critique of McMahon and McGannon (2015) study includes that while the recognition that researcher dispositions are not absolute, experiential learning provides a cross-sectional element of understanding. Using narrative inquiry approaches permitted the authors to examine the emotional and sensory experiences of participants. Claiming that “all [participants and study researchers] have gained some new meaning and understanding of their experiences” (p. 112) is believed, though, to be insufficiently evidenced although the findings logically assert that narration of experiences (included in the element of Researcher Dispositions) are of value. Lack of sufficient data and an insufficient number of participants (three) did not appear to directly corroborate findings.

The quasi-experimental study of Walsh et al. (2014) of longitudinal effects examined barriers to learning in high-poverty, urban elementary schools in the Boston Public School system and claimed that “every child’s strengths and needs across multiple domains is predicted to change teachers’ instruction by deepening what they know about their students” (p. 732). This deeper understanding of developmentally appropriate practice empowered teachers to make targeted instructional choices. With voluminous data and tracking of nearly 8,000 students over ten years, the study is worthy of merit.

Leventhal, Fauth, Brooks-Gunn (2005) suggested that school quality (including teacher instructional quality) may outweigh other effects on child outcomes. This assertion appears to be credible based on an analysis and critique of the concepts and coherence of this large quasi-experimental study which was financially supported by U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The study focused primarily on 321 New York City families. Attribute analysis included the review of the initial study, a 2.5-year follow-up study, and the final five-year follow-up study. Improving low-income children’s educational outcomes involve multiple dynamics, including school and classroom practices. The study revealed the complexity of effecting change in children’s well-being with plausible merit. The primary investigation study problem spotlighted the outcome of voucher systems and applies to poverty and instructional practices.

Previous synthesis of McEwen and Stewart 2014’s study described the authors’ assertion that inequalities experienced in childhood create unequal chances for success later and will require policy makers to look at more than income as a disadvantage that tackles more than only income as a source of disadvantage. Concepts regarding multiple dimensions of child outcomes presented scholarly merit as evidenced by the depth and choices of research synthesized. Based

in the depth of analysis and synthesis, augmented by a highly literate discussion of Canadian research, the claims appear to be accurate and creditable.

While findings presented in the 2015 American Institutes of Research regarding TK may be perceived as logical, the report was a “moment in time” evaluation of TK in California. As further indicated, “more than 80% [of children] attended some form of center-based preschool program. Thus, the benefits of TK found were over and above the benefits of other preschool programs experienced by the majority of children” (Manship et al., 2015, p. ii). Therefore, while informative, the report does not appear to comprehensively address how TK students were taught, what level of DAP was implemented, and the long-term effects of teachers with LEA K–8 credentials instructing four-year olds. Notably, study authors suggested “the observed impact was primarily on early academic measures. We did not find many effects of TK on social-emotional and behavioral outcomes” (p. iii) which, as previously evidenced, are key to long-term academic and social success.

Critiquing of this claim affirms the assertion that TK can provide an early academic advantage for some children; however, improving preliteracy and literacy skills is only a portion of the advantage of TK. “Transitional kindergarten improves students’ mathematical knowledge and problem-solving skills. Transitional kindergarten supports children’s behavioral self-regulation, but there is *no detectable impact on social-emotional skills* [emphasis added]” (p. ii) as indicated in the findings which appear to be accurate and logical based on the novelty of TK and the lack of longitudinal studies and focused research on this topic.

The 2008 RAND study “Early Care and Education in the Golden State” Knowing that the many report contributors are now my colleagues, the claims and merit of the report are without reproach. Analysis of the claims and concepts found in the report are accurate including the

statement “staff education requirements fall short of benchmarks that call for the lead classroom teacher to have a bachelor’s degree” (p. 81) which differs from LEA expectations. While LEA K–8 credentialing requires the acquisition of a 4-year degree, ECE until this point, has not. Specification of pedagogical goals, content, and methods were and are key components of understanding the quality of ECE in California.

The 26 teachers participating in Blasi’s (2002) multimethod study over an 18-week period participated in study groups, field site experiences, weekly journal writings, and reflective group sessions. “The primary strategy utilized in this project to ensure external validity was the provision of rich, thick, detailed descriptions” (p. 112) and through triangulation of data collection efforts, validity was evident.

In a critique of “Comparisons Between Early Childhood Education and Transitional Kindergarten” (Early, Bryant, Pianta, Clifford, Burchinal, Ritchie, Howes et al., 2006) and with high variance percentages reported (as high as 28%), the authors conceded that “mixed model analyses indicated that the within-class correlations and variances were too small to be reliably estimated” (p. 191); however, the authors concluded that “the interaction between years of teacher education and class hours was not significant in predicting any of the quality outcomes” (p. 188. In other words, the researchers suggested that there was no difference in student outcomes when they were taught by teachers who did not have a bachelor’s degree and those who did. “Children whose teachers majored in early childhood or child development made more gains in naming colors than children whose teachers majored in another type of education” (Early et al., 2006, p. 188) appears to be a hollow finding based on the complexity of data collected, control (or lack thereof) of competing variables, and the authors’ admittance that “these largely null findings contradict much of the previous early childhood research linking

teachers' education to higher-quality and children's academic gains" (p. 190). Contradiction to much of the previous early childhood research requires validation. Multiple cautions about interpretation do, however, validate that the findings of this research project may be disputed.

Grosemans, Boon, Verclairen, Dochy, and Kyndt's (2014) research of teacher culture convincingly asserted "the difference in findings between the quantitative and qualitative part could be due to the fact that interviews provided richer descriptions" (p. 151) than other methodology. Somewhat worrying was the finding that "[established as opposed to novice] teachers indicated that they valued their autonomy and also wanted to work out their problems by themselves" (p. 151). This may not bode well for TK children who may have [established] teachers who may prefer instructional experimentation rather than trying something new to them, such as research-based DAP relative to four-year olds. Study limitations appeared to be presented transparently which enhanced the validity of study findings.

Early and Winton (2001), in discussion of ECE career pathways, suggested that clear and specific information must be provided to those in the ECE workforce who desire to professionally advance. This has been the foundation of the Curriculum Alignment Project and the development of a career ladder/lattice in California as well as the work of California's implementation of TWB8. Knowing that the California has taken the results of studies such as Early and Winton's seriously, gives credence to the validity of the study.

While the finding that teaching experience does not guarantee expertise resonates with the content of the current study, the Schmidt (2010) study presented notable gaps and therefore, validity. The sample size was small. The participant sample of pre-service music teachers indicated a narrow frame of study. The sample exclusively included current students of the author which raised credibility concerns as the participants may have been participated because

of this relationship. While the author addressed this concern when stating “I recognize that my role as an instructor undoubtedly affected the data collection and analysis” (p. 134), insufficient evidence existed that participant responses were not directly related to this limitation.

The purposive stratified methodology chosen by Hallam, Chou, Hite, and Hite (2012) led to findings that supported both groups of teacher participants in the study. Findings also indicated clear differences, strengths, and weaknesses of two very different mentoring models. “The distinct mentoring models used by these two districts did have a different impact on the retention of beginning teachers” (p. 268). Credibility of the study outcomes and findings is confirmed when looking at the sample size ($n = 22$), duration of the study (3 years), and methodological choices.

The statement made by Ost and Schiman (2015) that “stable teaching assignments tend to improve teacher value added” (p. 120) is creditable based on the descriptive statistics, sophisticated graphic plotting, and clear analysis of data patterning. Discussion of fixed effects and variables lend credence to study findings. Likewise, critique of Silva’s (2016) study includes the understanding that while related, the study does not directly correlate to the current study. The children in the study had been referred to behaviorists for evaluation and intervention and findings could be applied in general settings which make bring relevance and credibility to the study’s findings. A positive critique of Silva’s (2016) study is based on the data collection tools used, analysis, and personal understanding of the problem identified herein.

Chapter 2 Summary

Research gaps, while often difficult to identify in social science and educational research, exist relative to California’s TK programs (Fong, 2016; Silva, 2016). To support such a claim, previous sub-sections of this chapter provided discussion which was intended to organize what

does exist before assessing what does not exist regarding professional preparation of TK teachers. Existing peer-reviewed research, while contiguous and intersticed, is not specific to LEA TK preparation. Understanding ECE preparation requires an understanding of two educational systems; the ECE system (or non-local education system) and the K–12 education system (or local education system). An understanding of TK teaching preparation requires an understanding that transitional TK teachers do not function in the early education sphere; they function in the TK–K–12 domain.

Having identified the focus of K–12 and ECE research over the past several decades framed the missing link of TK research. This literature review underscores a gap of peer-reviewed scholarly contributions regarding TK teacher preparedness as well as teaching TK students using developmentally appropriate practice in California public schools. What educators perceive to be their professional strengths, weaknesses, and challenges will inform interested stakeholders about how the recent initiative of TK has impacted both current and future cohorts of learners and educators. Current research literature also describes the impact of ECE DAP, including play (Jones & Reynolds, 1992; Rushton, Juola-Rushton, & Larkin, 2010; Wood, 2014) on student outcomes.

The lack of peer-reviewed, seminal research aside, correlating research indicates that teacher preparation, teacher self-confidence, teacher grade level reassignments, and teacher understanding of DAP all contribute to successful outcomes for children. Reviews and critiques of key research studies indicated that the problem of teacher preparedness to teach TK must be a critical component of decision-making at the state and federal levels. As discussed in detail in this chapter, Researcher Dispositions, Early Childhood Education Research, Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Education, California-Specific K–8 Teacher Preparation

and Credentialing, Complexities of Early Childhood Education, California-Specific Early Learning Foundations, Comparisons Between Early Childhood Education and Transitional Kindergarten, and Teacher Preparation are critical elements of discussion that will move California and other states to a new understanding of educational program complexities. It is because of these complexities that greater forethought and planning should occur.

To that end, a phenomenological one-on-one interview approach with TK educator study participants will provide personal insights regarding perceived preparation quality and teaching confidence. Discussions regarding preservice coursework content and outcomes will provide evidence of educator confidence levels in implementing transitional kindergarten programs. As a contemporary phenomenon, California's TK legislation is a model for other states to study, consider, and either implement or reject. If other states study and consider implementing TK, a study of this type will provide background information, successes, and potential pitfalls. Most importantly, knowledge of the potential pitfall of moving children from one educational system to another (i.e. early childhood education settings in non-LEA settings to LEA settings) could prevent assigning teachers to transitional kindergarten until full preparation has been achieved. A qualitative phenomenological approach best captures preparation experiences, perspectives regarding DAP, and implementation practices.

Phenomenological examination of TK teachers' perspectives on professional preparation as well as culturally-specific assumptions and opinions about school, education, and children may reveal insufficient training and incomplete capacities to understand and implement best practices as discovered, publicized, and recommended in ECE research (Horm, Hyson, & Winton, 2013; Hyson, Biggar, Tomlinson, & Morris, 2009). Insufficiency and collaborative paucity may be the culpability of multiple education stakeholders including policymakers,

credentialing institutions, and local education agencies seeking to increase enrollment. Regardless of responsibility, the reality of children assigned to classrooms with well-meaning, but ill-prepared teachers may present a problem of educational quality parity.

Investigating the phenomenon allowed me the opportunity to reveal how local public agency teachers perceive the effectiveness of their own pre-service training related to early childhood education and transitional kindergarten program implementation. Participation of teachers with differing levels of K–8 experience enhanced research findings. To interpret the value of ECE DAP in teacher preparation, I collected data on individual perspectives regarding DAP implementation competencies and confidence in teaching TK. Additionally, collection of data regarding TK DAP implementation in current TK classrooms will support interpretation of program and instructional quality.

Proving or confirming were not elements of this investigation, although demonstrating that teachers are or are not prepared to implement the best practices of ECE through DAP become evident as the study progressed. Establishing teacher preparedness to use DAP and teacher implementation of DAP in TK LEA settings may prove useful for national stakeholders considering the inclusion of TK in the K–8 educational system.

Uniquely framing this study with what is known and understood about teacher preparation, child development research, and early childhood education developmentally appropriate practice will assist the educational community in understanding the impact of the TK phenomenon. An investigation examining the impact of how California LEA TK educators evaluate the content, quality, and quantity of early childhood education and child development coursework in pre-service K–12 degree preparation programs and credential acquirement, as well as how these teachers describe their knowledge and skills regarding DAP will yield significant

findings. This literature review has provided strong support for a research project to respond to these two research questions.

In Chapter 3 research methodology will be discussed as a means by which to understand and respond to the problem, answer posed questions, and guide future endeavors related to transitional kindergarten.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction to Chapter 3

Every day children are brought to California public school classrooms and left with adults who are charged with the responsibility of educating, respecting, and addressing each child's unique learning style and developmental progression of learned skills over time. Parents rely on a system of education that promises a "free and appropriate education" (FAPE) (Katsiyannis & Maag, 1997; Walker, 2006). "Appropriate" means that the education offered addresses a child's unique needs rather than needs that may be connected to generalized age or grade equivalency. "Appropriate" education refers to the need for educators to use instructional strategies that are developmentally apposite for individual learners. School principals rely on and have oversight responsibility of individual teachers' abilities to successfully teach children as often measured by both summative and formative assessments (Stronge, Ward, & Grant, 2011; Von Frank, 2011). District administrators rely on site administrators to ensure groups of children at varying grade levels are measured at *proficient* or higher in all content areas (Christman, Goertz, & Lawrence, 2010; Psencik et al., 2014). School boards, local communities, county-level stakeholders, state departments of education, and American society rely on educators to prepare children to successfully meet or exceed expectations mandated by state and federal systems of education (Goyette & Xie, 1999; Kirk et al., 2012; Letendre, Hofer, & Shimizu, 2003; Trusty, 2002).

The significance of this phenomenological interview study encompasses a single focus. Paying closer attention to and modifying how K–8 teachers are prepared to implement early childhood education (ECE) developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) in transitional kindergarten (TK) in local education agency (LEA) settings will move public school education

policy and implementation further toward the intent of federal, state, and local goals of producing well-educated learners. Currently, K–8 classroom teachers have been prepared to address K–8 content and pedagogy and it is those same teachers who have been placed in TK classrooms. Well-educated learners, it should be noted, are those learners who have developed the skills to work cooperatively, continue a robust curiosity for learning, and have the capacity to successfully function in many different settings including school, professional endeavors, and social encounters (Brown, 2015; Rice, 2015; White, 2010). Understanding how these skills and dispositions develop in the early years, from birth through approximately four years of age, are essential in providing education programs that are developmentally appropriate. Observing children and recording developmental growth over time takes the place of standardized assessments (Scales, Perry, & Tracy, 2012; Simpson, 1997).

Discussions with teachers about their multi-year experiences with both preparation and implementation practices will significantly impact the education and political fields, both in California and the nation by providing a new and nuanced perspective on teacher preparation programs that are legislatively adjoined to existing programs. When considering the implementation of programs new to local education agencies (LEAs), significant discussion with education professionals should occur. Before moving children from one system to another and before assigning teachers to new programs, legislative decision-makers must consider all possible consequences.

Intending to cause deep, collaborative deliberation, this study provides unique insight into the successes and challenges of TK implementation. Further research regarding legislative action in the educational realm could result in more teachers being appropriately prepared to respond to the needs of students in a new program. TK legislation did not include a period of

DAP preparation for LEA teachers. Instead, children were moved from ECE settings where DAP was understood and applied to classrooms with teachers who may not have had correlating preparation to adequately serve these youngest learners.

Methodological discussion will center on TK teacher preparation and confidence in implementing DAP. Discussion in Chapter 3 will focus on an organized research design and implementation plan which provided a foundation of discovery related to the day-to-day experiences of TK teachers in LEA settings. Framing this concept are the multiple theoretical conclusions that point to the reality of TK teacher preparation (American Institute of Research, 2016; National Association of Elementary School Principals, 2014; Ravitch, 2014).

Revisiting findings of major reports and other research projects discussed in Chapter 2 will be accompanied by discussion of methodology extrapolating key elements of research design and outcomes that had influence on how this study was conducted. Revisiting the research questions, discussion of various study designs, as well as presentation of the conceptual framework will provide readers with context for this study. Highlighting concerns and problems will lead to anticipation of interview data collected and recommendations.

Research Questions

Considering that K–8 teacher preparation programs offer a broad range of theoretical knowledge, practical application, and skill-building opportunities, research questions have been developed to provide an avenue by which to deeply reveal practitioners' specific experiences with early childhood preparation. Understanding that teaching children of approximately four years of age is different from teaching students in K–8, I sought to ascertain what experienced TK teachers believe about the skills, knowledge, and disposition development provided in preservice programs.

Research question 1. How do California local education agency educators assigned to teach in transitional kindergarten classrooms describe the content, quality, and quantity of early childhood education and child development coursework in pre-service K–8 degree preparation programs and credential acquirement?

Understanding that teacher confidence in implementing developmentally appropriate best practices in school environments significantly impacts children, a second key research question was developed:

Research question 2. How do California local education agency educators assigned to teach in transitional kindergarten classrooms describe their experiences implementing research-based early childhood education developmentally appropriate practices in a transitional kindergarten classroom?

Sharing data collected and findings revealed from interviews with K–8 credentialed, practicing teachers about inclusion of early childhood education and/or child development coursework provides stakeholders deep information regarding practitioners’ preparation perceptions. Sharing this same data provides decision-makers an understanding of teacher confidence in implementing early childhood education strategies.

Purpose and Design of the Study

Succinctly stated, the purpose of this investigation was to understand how K–8 credentialed teachers implementing TK programs viewed their own professional preparation and how this preparation impacted DAP implementation in their classrooms. Interview data exposed the levels of confidence and understanding that LEA K–8 credentialed TK teachers exhibited about research-based practices in ECE. Diving deeper into the “why’s” of the professional practice choices of TK teachers through selected sampling strategies informs stakeholders about

the differing educational paths TK teachers have been engaged in since TK legislation took effect. Such purposive sampling created broad information-rich data (Serra, Psarra, & Obrien, 2018).

Based on a conceptual framework which included teacher preparation, early childhood education developmentally appropriate practice, K–8 teacher credentialing requirements, child development, and several education and psychological theories on learning, the qualitative phenomenological research protocol applied in this study identified California TK teachers' understanding and professional opinions (Turan, Toprack, & Sahin, 2010; Walker, 2008) about their experiences as K–8 educators teaching in TK classrooms.

Furthermore, this research project adds to the scholarly literature collection to offer edification to other states and U. S. territories who may consider adding TK to a K–8 system of education about the California TK experience. Considering the needs of children must be the primary priority of stakeholders (Walker, Kutsyuruba, & Bishop-Yong, 2011). This will take careful planning, meaningful collaboration, and forethought about changing the complex structure of educational systems sometimes bound in tradition and based on history rather than contemporary research. Bearing in mind that educators' self-perceptions of preparation programs are important when considering implementation confidence, decision-makers should include frontline educator input. When teachers feel prepared, they feel confident in implementation of instructional strategies (American Institute of Research, 2016; Buchanan et al., 1998). The degree to which educators effectively implement DAP directly impacts the educational experiences of children. Replication of this study will be essential (Brandt et al., 2013) to ensure that other states and U.S. territories proactively address the concerns raised about California's TK implementation.

Interviews (File & Gullo, 2002; Maynard, La Paro, & Johnson, 2014), case studies (Anderson & Stillman, 2013; Tal, 2010), focus group discussions (Kuroda, 2014; Worthington et al., 2011), observation and shadowing instrumentation (Cuthrell, Steadman, Stapleton, & Hodge, 2016; McDonald & Simpson, 2014) have all been applied in research projects generally related to teacher preparation and teacher confidence. For this study, interviewing participants face-to-face yielded significant findings.

Choosing a methodological approach which is appropriate, feasible, and realistic is a primary task for the investigator and audience who are depending on accurate results. Collection of first-hand phenomenological data based on information and understanding provided by individuals who have experienced a particular phenomenon is critical. Soliciting evidence from discussions with educators teaching TK with background experience primarily in K–8 settings provided meaningful empirical claims to substantiate the identified problem of insufficient teacher preparedness to teach TK children.

Collecting firsthand statements and assigning meaning based on a predetermined set of categories allowed for categorization and paraphrased interpretation of established TK educators' understanding and experiences related to formal teacher preparation and experiential understanding. Thick, rich descriptions of preparedness shared from the perspective of current TK educators provides the field with a new perspective regarding research implementation and research gaps. Using a qualitative, phenomenological methodological approach in this study was rational and intended to “allow flexibility to probe initial participant responses—to ask why or how. The researcher must listen carefully to what participants say, engage with them according to their individual personalities and styles, and use ‘probes’ to encourage [elaboration]” (Family Health International, n.d., p. 4). Encouraging elaborative self-reflection by participants resulted

in an expanse of information (Ross, 2017; Way, Zier, & Tracy, 2015) that contributes to the educational community regarding TK teacher preparation and DAP implementation confidence.

A qualitative approach, using phenomenological methodological protocol, was the research design of choice for several reasons. First, while catalogues of course offerings of teacher preparation programs, as well as course syllabi, could be easily accessed and reviewed, it was through direct discussions with teachers who have completed such programs that a deeper understanding of perceived preparedness occurred. As study participants reflected (Ross, 2017; Way, Kanak, Zwier, & Tracy, 2015) on the content and outcomes of institutes of higher education (IHEs) preparation, themes of perceived competence became evident. The meanings that current TK educators attribute to individual preparation programs were collected through one-on-one interviews and reflected personal perceptions and unique views (Dempsey, Dowling, Larkin, & Murphy, 2016). Simultaneously, interview data was collected, coded, and analyzed regarding how these same participant educators perceived their own classroom implementation of DAP.

Teachers assigned to teach TK between 2012 and 2020 are experiencing a new phenomenon in K–12 LEA settings. Researchers must continue to study and widely distribute the best practices in early childhood education settings and determine how to best apply developmentally appropriate practices in the phenomenon of TK (Taplin, 2015). To interpret the value of early childhood education DAP in teacher preparation, study data was collected on individual perspectives regarding DAP implementation competencies and confidence in teaching TK. Additionally, collection of data regarding TK DAP implementation in current TK classrooms supported interpretation of program and instructional quality.

Research Population and Sampling Method

Participant population. Six million learners attend 10,000 schools and are taught by 295,000 teachers in California (Fingertip Facts on Education in California – CalEdFacts, 2019). Of 295,000 teachers, approximately 3,787 were assigned to TK classrooms during the 2015–2016 school year to serve approximately 83,321 TK learners (“Transitional Kindergarten Data”, 2019). These numbers likely increased in subsequent years as more schools began implementing TK programs. “Whilst occasionally it may be possible to collect data from the total population, for most research projects this will be impossible. As condition of access, [the] potential population of research participants may be constrained to a smaller subgroup” (Saunders, 2012, p. 2).

For purposive stratified groupings, the participant population included two specific groups: those who participated in CPIN transitional kindergarten trainings and those who did not. Approximately, 9,000 trainings sessions have been attended (this is a duplicated, rather than unduplicated count, which means that the same participant may be counted more than one time because he/she attended more than one training session). Of the attendees to-date, approximately 4,500 (from a total population of approximately 295,000) were TK teachers, 1,800 were preschool teachers, and 500 were kindergarten teachers. Additionally, training sessions have been attended by administrators, special education teachers, curriculum and instruction specialists as well as those in “other” categories (e.g., behavior specialists, instructional assistants, teachers of other grade levels, and childcare providers).

Sampling method. Recognizing the size of the potential participant population, a stratified, purposive sampling methodology was utilized. Using public information from the California Department of Education’s website, all schools in California who offer TK were

identified. An email communication was distributed to each of the 11 California Preschool Instructional Network (CPIN) TK Leads. These 11 leads, who have been coordinating training and support to TK teachers as a response to legislative mandate in 2014, were asked to identify TK educators on the list who were immersed in the phenomenon of TK. Additionally, they were asked to identify those teachers who chose to participate in the CPIN transitional kindergarten professional learning opportunities and those who did not. When a list of names of teachers was collected, an email was distributed to these specific TK educators (see Appendix A). The email included information about the purpose of this study, the research questions, description of the time commitment needed by participants, as well as information about the researcher. Affirmative email responses to participation resulted in another communication. A fourth email confirmed participation or thanked the applicant for participation interest (see Appendices C and D).

It was desired that 20 educators participate in the study. Selection criteria included accessing The California Commission on Teacher Credentialing website to ensure that all potential participants were credentialed and in good standing with the Commission (see Appendix E). Although there were more than the desired number of potential participants in all regions, participants were determined by purposeful selection based on geographic setting (rural, suburban, or urban), regional representation, number of years and grade level teaching experience, and combination and single grade configurations.

Sampling of potential teaching participants came first in the form of written survey (see Appendix G). Basic demographic information was solicited including: name, teacher preparation college or university of attendance (coded for confidentiality), degree(s) and credential(s) earned, number of years teaching in a TK classroom, region, type of TK classroom (single or multi-

grade), number of TK students in the classroom, and the number of CPIN professional learning trainings completed.

Collecting this demographic data was intended to present a detailed picture of the participant group as a whole and as subgroups within the whole. “Typical case purposive samples are chosen usually to provide an illustrative profile that is considered representative, albeit not statistically. Such non-probability samples are justified by their typicality of the wider populations” (Saunders, 2012, p. 6). While heterogeneously grouped by teaching position, demographic data provided insights into the perceptions TK teachers have about their preparation and teaching experiences. For example, teachers in rural settings brought a unique perspective on program implementation. Teachers assigned to combination classrooms have experienced TK differently from those in single grade classrooms. Again, while not gathered for direct quantitative purposes, such data broadens the scope of understanding the TK phenomenon.

Instrumentation

Choosing a methodological approach which was appropriate, feasible, and realistic was a primary task for the investigator and audience who depend on accurate results. Discussion of methodological approaches adopted by researchers who have probed teacher preparation program outcomes, teacher competencies, child development, early childhood education concerns, TK, and DAP provided insight into procedural choices. Collection of first-hand phenomenological data based on information and understanding provided by individuals who have experienced particular phenomenon was critical; that is, soliciting evidence from discussions with educators teaching TK with background experience primarily in K–8 settings provided meaningful empirical claims regarding LEA teacher preparation to provide appropriate education for four-year old children.

Collecting firsthand statements and conferring generalized meaning allowed for categorization and paraphrased interpretation of TK educators' understanding and experiences related to formal teacher preparation and experiential understanding. Descriptions of preparedness shared from the perspective of current TK teachers provides the field with a new perspective regarding research implementation and research gaps.

Survey and interview instrumentation focused on educator preparation coursework and teacher classroom practices (see Appendices G and H). Presenting yes/no, multiple-choice, and short answer responses, participant data would have been very narrow and insufficient to provide understanding (Lin, 2011; Oliver, 2011) about how teachers feel about teaching TK based on professional preparation. Applying Likert scale response options would have provided limited options for in-depth analysis (Gregoire, 1989; Maurer & Pierce, 1998).

Participants were scheduled, via telephone or email communication, for a physical face-to-face initial interview if geographically feasible or an online face-to-face interview with participation consent collected at that time. Data from initial interviews was collected by voice recording and detailed note-taking that was coded for in-depth analysis to respond to the two research questions of interest.

Open-ended interview questions asked of participants using a semi-structured interview platform (Kallio, Pietilä, Johnson, & Kangasniemi, 2016) allowed me to prepare questions that all participants were asked to respond to while also allowing the freedom to ask follow-up questions based on individually unique participant responses (see Appendix H). For example, “who or what (with a follow-up of ‘how’) influences the way you have prepared the learning environment for your students?” “Do you consider DAP when planning learning for upcoming instructional weeks and if so, how?” “What are your thoughts about having K–8 credentialed

teachers in early education classrooms?” Such questioning and examination of participant perceptions further informs TK stakeholders and interested individuals about the unique experience of teaching TK.

“Qualitative methods allow flexibility to probe initial participant responses—to ask why or how. The researcher must listen carefully to what participants say, engage with them according to their individual personalities and styles, and use ‘probes’ to encourage [elaboration]” (Mack et al., 2005, p. 4). Another way to think about careful listening includes “the ability to maximize the quality of individual response [which will contribute] greatly to the accuracy and usability of the outcome” (Roller, 2011, p. 5) predicated on the overall desire to determine participants experience with this phenomenon.

Examining the phenomena of TK preparation and teaching, data collection of educator perspectives on professional preparation and DAP implementation in LEA settings meant preparing comprehensive interview questioning. Each participant had both similar and unique experiences and perspectives (Dicicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Transcription of interview data, using appropriate coding and data management protocol, uncovered commonalities that were sorted by theme and unique perspectives.

Interview questions were organized in three sections that provided: establishment of the context of the participant’s experience, solicitation of concrete details of the participant’s present lived experience in the transitional kindergarten classroom, and participant reflection on the meaning of his or her experience teaching transitional kindergarten.

Data Collection

Responses to the demographic survey were charted by survey components (see Appendix G). Originally, *Qualtrics*, a web-based software was to be utilized to create, distribute, and

generate reports from the responses provided by participants on the demographic survey. A spreadsheet was developed to track and organize TK teacher participants including the Region number, IHE preparation program attended, degrees and credentials conferred, years of TK teaching/administration experience, classroom configuration, and number of students. Such data collection was uncomplicated, and it was determined that *Qualtrics* software was unnecessary.

Phenomenological study required deep interviewing techniques which meant that the interviewer becomes a key factor in applying instrumentation. On-the-spot thinking, processing, and analyzing were applied as consistently as possible. Planning, preparing survey and confidentiality forms, organizing scheduling, and identifying interview locations required a level of technical competence (Byrne, 2001; Polkinghorne, 2005). Ensuring that each participant felt comfortable through remarks made throughout the solicitation process, interview opening, and on-going interview required social competence. Additionally, steering the interview in a way that responded to the two primary research questions required quick analysis and potential change in the conversation direction.

Posing meaningful prompts and questions, allowing for participant “think time,” and being completely focused on listening was a high-level skill which was within my skill set and needed to be finely pursued during each interaction with participants. Allowing, no *encouraging*, the participant, through subtle and pointed maneuvering, to reflect and think deeply resulted in quality data collection. As an authentic listener by nature, my emotional, psychological, and social proficiencies brought participants to a level of trust and depth. Identifying the on-the-spot times to listen, to ask a question, to modify how a prompt was expressed, and to move on if discomfort became apparent through verbal or physical cues and to keep the discussion moving

in a focused direction proved to be essential components of this study. Communication skills generated participant cooperation and participant enthusiasm for this scholarly project.

While focusing on interview direction related to the research questions, it was important to compartmentalize all personal bias that may have arisen. Selective hearing or selective attention on particular topics would not have resulted in quality data collection. Revising my knowledge and potentially changing my bias was accepted prior to interviewing. This is where balance was necessary. While I asked questions and waited for answers, recorded the answers, and moved to the next prompt or question, the interviews could have become stale and underwhelming. To fit the research goals a dialogue approach was appropriate.

Competing with my biases was the level of knowledge I have about transitional kindergarten, professional development, professional learning, early education, K–8 education, teacher competence, learning environment design, and myriad experiences in K–IHE education over decades of professional service in a variety of settings. While knowing much about the interview subject matter, I was required to remain neutral to solicit the authentic experiences of participants (McPhee & Terry, 2007). Having prepared questions assisted in bias and knowledge neutrality while not dismissing the open nature of the interview design.

Realizing that some interviews could have required meeting in the cyber domain, I needed to make sure that my technological skills were of such as quality to not interfere with or detract from the central research questions. All efforts were made to conduct the interview face-to-face (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006) and indeed, all interviews did occur in a face-to-face format. Interviewing by voice only would not have allowed for non-verbal cues to be ascertained which was important when facilitating pertinent dialogue.

“Any researcher who wishes to become proficient at doing qualitative analysis must learn to code well and easily. The excellence of the research rests in large part on the excellence of the coding” (Strauss, 1997 as cited by Saldaña, 2009, p. 13). To that end, multiple levels of coding were applied. In the first cycle, both descriptive and in vivo coding strategies were simultaneously exploited. Using these methods of coding was considered the primary transition from data collection to data analysis. Application of in vivo coding, as well as precoding and the inclusion of analytic memos regarding basic descriptive information collected from the electronic survey, allowed me to “Code and categorize data by what participants talk about . . . but their value, attitude, and belief systems about [the topic] may vary greatly . . . sometimes you may group things together because they might also have something in common” (Saldaña, 2009, p. 21). Paying exceptionally close attention to language while simultaneously reflecting on emerging and potential patterns described by teachers experiencing the TK phenomenon was the first step. Double-spaced transcriptions on the left-hand side of the page allowed room for initially hand-writing codes and notes.

In the second coding cycle, in Vivo coding was refined, and Magnitude Coding was added. This supplemental code was added to the coded datum to identify intensity, presence, duration, or personal evaluation of the topic content. Triangulation of collected data provided correlation between preparation program components as perceived by the participant, perceived teaching and program oversight confidence, and implementation of developmentally appropriate practices.

Identification of Attributes

Attributes and concepts that frame this study included best practices, classroom teacher, Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP), ECE, educator, implementation, LEA, preservice

preparation, teaching confidence, and TK. First, *early childhood education* is a term that refers to educational programs and strategies geared toward children from birth to the age of eight. This time period is widely considered the most vulnerable and crucial stage of a person's life. Early childhood education often focuses on guiding children to learn through play. The term commonly refers to preschool or infant/child care programs. Learning through play is essential in developmentally appropriate practice which is defined:

Best practices are defined as a wide range of individual activities, policies, and programmatic approaches to achieve positive changes in student outcomes or academic behaviors. This umbrella term encompasses the following designations that differ on the level of evidence supporting desired student or institutional outcomes: promising, validated, and exemplary. Specifically, ECE best practices include *developmentally appropriate practice* (DAP) which is defined in this study as an approach to teaching grounded in the research on how young children develop and learn and in what is known about effective early education. Its framework is designed to promote young children's optimal learning and development. DAP involves teachers meeting young children where they are (by stage of development), both as individuals and as part of a group; and helping each child meet challenging and achievable learning goals.

Next, *classroom teacher* refers to professional teachers who work with students as a whole class in a classroom while *educator* refers to all education professionals and paraprofessionals including principals or other heads of a school, teachers, and other professional instructional staff. *Teaching confidence*, also referred to as *teacher efficacy*, is "Teachers' confidence in their ability to promote students' learning" (Hoy as cited by Protheroe, 2008, p. 1).

In order to be considered a professional educator, *preservice preparation* or *teacher preparation programs* are usually associated with colleges or universities and typically fall into two broad categories: consecutive programs and concurrent programs. In consecutive programs, usually credential candidates first obtain a bachelor's degree (often in the subject area they plan to teach, though in many states this is not required). They then enroll in a post-baccalaureate teacher credentialing program, and in some programs may also earn a master's degree at the same time. In a concurrent program, a credential candidate will study the subject(s) they plan to teach and will also complete a course of study in pedagogy leading to a teaching credential at the same time.

Conceptually, *implementation* refers to the realization of an application, or execution of a plan, idea, model, design, specification, standard, or policy. Defined as the first year of a 2-year kindergarten program that uses a modified kindergarten curriculum and is age and developmentally appropriate, transitional kindergarten, defines a program for children of approximately four years of age in a local education agency. A *local education agency* is a public board of education or other public authority legally constituted within a State for either administrative control or direction of, or to perform a service function for, public elementary schools or secondary schools in a city, county, township, school district, or other political subdivision of a State, or for a combination of school districts or counties that is recognized in a State as an administrative agency for its public elementary schools or secondary schools. Lastly, while the words *learner*, *student*, *pupil*, and *child* are used relatively interchangeably there are contexts in which one of these words may be more distinct and unambiguous than the other three.

Data Analysis Procedures

Procedures related to collecting interview data rigidly adhered to qualitative instrumentation best practices. Capturing words and phrases that correlate to the attributes of this study were considered language-based data (Barker, Pistrang, & Elliott, 2016; Kitto & Barnett, 2007; Norris, Plonsky, Ross, & Schoonen, 2015). The researcher conducted interviews of three participants and then coded these first three before continuing with additional participant interviews. This allowed time to determine if the data was being captured in a way that would allow for clear triangulation (Meijer, Verloop, & Beijaard, 2002; Wray, Markovic, & Manderson, 2007). Additionally, coding after three participant interviews allowed for the adjustment of prompting and ensured that participant responses completely addressed the topic. Using Salana's (2016) *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*, I used computer software to record words, phrases, and themes as well as my own ability to identify meaning and interpret participant transcripts.

Organizing the collected data and maintaining consistent attention to detail provided the basis for this language-based research project. Code names/numbers for each participant were assigned. Dates and times of interviews were recorded. All interview dialogue was digitally recorded and transcribed including both the interviewee's responses as well as my questioning and prompting. Transcripts were triple-spaced to allow for note-taking and initial analysis of key words, phrases, and themes. Once an interview had been transcribed, I listened again to the recording while following the transcript to ensure accuracy and simultaneously identify (either by bolded font or color highlights) key words and phrases that were later sorted by theme.

Themes came to the fore as individual and unique and/or unique to a particular demographic and/or as group themes. Themes were identified in each interview transcript and

carried over to a study spreadsheet where all themes were reported and preserved. Participant responses within a theme were noted, as well as the page number of the transcript.

Limitations of the Research Design

Limitations of using a qualitative research design included an understanding of the human condition (MacNeill, Foley, Quirk, & McCambridge, 2016). Study participants were asked to explain personal perceptions, memories of preparation program components, and personal interpretation of the phenomenon of transitional kindergarten. Perceptions, memories, and interpretation cannot guarantee the accuracy of these recollections or understandings (Condie, 2012; Wheeldon, 2011). Personal biases and even misunderstandings of the interviewees may impact responses. If, for example, a participant does not see value in transitional kindergarten, responses could be skewed to that bias or if a TK teacher understands his/her current assignment as temporary (a “grandfathered in” perspective), his/her responses could reflect that understanding. "When you select certain methodologies and designs, for example phenomenology, they come with limitations over which may have little control" (Simon & Goes, 2013, p. 1).

An additional limitation may have included my ability to mask my reactions to interviewee responses. While proactive practicing of interviewing was conducted, this may not have assured that my facial expressions, body language, and other hints of my own biases did not interfere with or change the responses of the participant (Chenail, 2011; Frels & Onwuegbuzie, 2013; Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2010). Likewise, time pressures, scheduling difficulties, and conflicts with work and personal obligations became limitations in this study. Self-reporting of these and other unforeseen limitations are included in the final presentation of the study.

Conversely, delimitations should also be recognized. Boundaries were set to capture a narrow set of understandings from participants. Survey and interview content focused on the two primary research questions:

1. How do California local education agency educators assigned to teach in transitional kindergarten classrooms describe the content, quality, and quantity of early childhood education and child development coursework in pre-service K–8 degree preparation programs and credential acquirement?

2. How do California local education agency educators assigned to teach in transitional kindergarten classrooms describe their experiences implementing research-based early childhood education developmentally appropriate practices in a TK classroom?

Delimitations included potential participant demographic criterion limiting participation to only those educators who are teaching TK in an LEA setting in California. While not generalizable due to both limitations and delimitations, results of this study will be transferable so that others interested in the identified study topics or similar topics can understand more about how educators experience the phenomenon of TK. New understandings may assist other researchers in identifying pertinent areas of study (Elmer, 2012; Richards, 1984) to address the needs of teachers and thereby, the outcomes of students in California’s public education system.

Validation

Credibility. Prolonged engagement in interview analysis, developing thick and rich descriptions of participant experiences and perceptions, reflecting on my own biases, and periodically debriefing with peers engaged in TK work offers readers authenticity of effort, researcher credibility, and reliability and dependability of data collection and analysis.

Triangulation of data sources offers readers connections (Ackel-Eisnach & Müller, 2012; Ma &

Norwich, 2006; Oliver-Hoyo & Allen, 2006) and an overall sense of how educator perceptions impact program implementation and provide transferability for others interested in understanding teacher effectiveness in TK settings. Clarifying my understanding of interview responses with study participants as a method of *member checking* was recorded and reported in both Chapters 4 and 5 with the intent of providing transparent data collection measures (Davies & Dodd, 2002; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Seale, 1999; Stenbacka, 2001). On the spot member checking ensured that errors of fact and interpretation were minimized and transparently described.

Expert review evaluation was solicited on-going from peers with terminal degrees and content expertise. As an employee of the California Department of Education (CDE), access to experts at all levels of elementary, middle, high school, and IHE is readily available.

Collaborating with peers about the importance of this study, gathering feedback and input, reflecting on the desired impact of this study validated authentic effort to inform stakeholders about the phenomenon of TK. Soliciting responses to formative questions such as “How can I improve this study?,” “What do you think is missing?,” “Will this accurately reflect the TK experience of California educators?” provided me with expert insight. While a content specialist was assigned to support this study, daily access to expert colleagues in TK and IHEs ensured that the study was an accurate representation of the needs outlined in the study. Summative strategies to identify how the data answered research questions will be valuable to stakeholders.

Establishing credibility criterion by focusing on matches between expert reviewers and expert participants were represented in interview questioning and response recording.

Dependability. Initial coding of participant responses led to more complex and elaborate coding as linkages become evident (Bernauer, 2015; Zafar, 2010). When no new themes were presented, the categories were accepted and validated and presented in analysis that triangulates

all primary and secondary themes. Limiting required participant demographics offered a foundation for additional study. For this project, participants were required to be currently assigned to teach in a California public school TK classroom (single or combination class) and hold a valid K–8 credential in good standing with the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing; purposive stratification of two sub-groups, those who have attended transitional kindergarten professional learning trainings and those who have not. Age, gender, race, experience beyond TK, and other demographic elements were not required for this study but should be considered as part of a larger research agenda in order to extend the findings of this study.

Expected Findings

Conceptually, I expected to find that K–8 educators do not have a clear understanding of what early childhood education developmentally appropriate practice is or what it looks like in an effective TK learning environment. It was also expected that most TK teachers would perceive their pre-service training to have inadequately prepared them to effectively teach TK programs. These expectations needed to be set aside during the study data collection and analysis periods (Fitzpatrick, 2014). Transparency of this expectation is consciously represented.

Professional experience in LEA settings, collaboration with the California Preschool Instructional Network (CPIN) Leads, and consultation with experts in early childhood education and higher education have developed the expectation that teachers assigned to TK do not have the background, education, or confidence of implementation of DAP; however, authentic effort was made to allow the data to be unbiasedly discovered and reported. Intending to reduce any biasing effect began with explicitly identifying the bias. Enlisting close review of dissertation

committee members, experts in the field, and readers of this document was expected and welcomed.

As presented previously, a gap in scholarly literature on the phenomenon of TK exists. This study provides findings on the phenomenon which can become part of growing body of knowledge of TK and early education strategies in K–8 environments. Implications for the field include motivation to pay close attention to student outcomes in the eight cohorts of children in TK 2012–2020 and provide proactive intervention as possible and as required, as well as inform national stakeholders considering the programmatic addition of TK in LEA settings.

Ethical Issues

To guard study participants from all potential ill effects related to study participation, consideration of the needs of participants was primary in the planning of research methodology, conducting of participant contact and interviewing elements, and during the stages of data analysis. The study presented minimal risk to participants. It was anticipated that participants would be contacted by me least five times with the first contact being a generic introduction to the study to solicit participation followed by confirmation of interest of eligible participants, interview scheduling, interview, and follow-up conversations as needed. All contact was logged and communication types (such as generic emails and Survey Monkey template with voluntary participation acceptance) are included in the study appendix.

Initial written communication to participants included full disclosure of the study design, focus, and significance (Jackson, 2013; Kara & Pickering, 2017). Participation was voluntary and this condition was restated in all communication with participants. Confidentiality was maintained. Identification of participants will not be available.

Conflict of interest assessment. Transparency related to my position as an employee of the California Department of Education (CDE) and the contract monitor of three TK contracts with the CDE was be shared. The contracts were identified as: (a) CPIN/TK contract with the Sacramento County Office of Education and individual grants with the 11 superintendent regions for \$10,000,000.00, (b) TK Curriculum Alignment Project with Yosemite Community College for \$500,000.00, and later (c) California Transitional Kindergarten Stipend program with California's 58 Early Education Local Planning Councils for \$15,000,000.00.

As a CDE employee and contract monitor of TK contracts, advantages for me as the study's principal investigator were advantages that other researchers may not have. Access to ECE and LEA content experts, legislation, contract projects and related projects provided me an inside view of the TK phenomenon. No personal gain or financial connection was made between my job responsibilities and the study; however, this could be misconstrued or misunderstood. Transparency of study purpose and significance, project focus and research design, as well as clearly delineating my role at CDE to potential participants minimized any perceived conflict of interest.

Researcher's position. In a variety of education-related roles over three decades, my positions on teacher preparation, teaching skills, and teachers' understanding of developmentally appropriate practice has been influenced by diverse factors. One primary influence has been my experience as an instructional leader/program administrator who has interviewed, hired, released, and formally and informally evaluated LEA K–8 educators. Knowledge gained during periods of oversight and evaluation, as well as review of credentials and preparation coursework, established my belief that K–8 credentialed teachers do not have the background and preparation to include research-based best practices of early childhood education.

While some early elementary teachers did have early childhood education experiences (i.e. teaching preschool) before coming to K–8 LEA settings, many did not. Moving within the grades often required a steep learning curve for teachers new to a grade level or grade level cluster. Reassigning a third grade teacher, for example, to an earlier grade cluster meant ensuring that all available professional learning and peer-to-peer collaboration were in place. Even with these accommodations and preparations, and even with a willing and cooperative teacher, I was hesitant about such movement knowing that some teachers were not as well-prepared as others to move to a new grade level. Changing student populations, increases and decreases in enrollment, and new legislative mandates required the consideration and actuality of reassignments.

My position, therefore, was that in order to effectively teach in early education settings, the teacher must have sufficient preparation coursework focused on DAP. All attempts were made to disregard this bias to accurately analyze the data to be collected.

Ethical issues in the study. Participants were exposed to interview questions that may have been uncomfortable (Turner, 2010). For example, responding to questions about professional knowledge and implementation skills may have been perceived as discomforting for some participants. Additionally, harm could have arisen in data analysis results. Participants could perceive that responses to questions resulted in a determination of inadequate professional preparation and inadequate implementation of DAP. With assistance of the dissertation committee and other experts, and following institutional review board approval, care was taken to word questions to avoid any embarrassment or discomfort. Respondent identity and interview question/prompt responses were vigilantly protected, and all communication reiterated confidentiality protection. Unlike other recent TK scholarly projects, this project has no

corporate, governmental, or philanthropic sponsor. Prospective respondents were informed regarding this study element.

Initial contact explained that results of this study would be used in a dissertation to complete doctoral degree requirements and would be offered to the education community as a source of significant information collected from TK educators and correlating participant perceptions and experiences to the phenomenon of TK. Participants were told that I bear all responsibility and would report problems and weaknesses encountered during the study.

Practices regarding the collection and linking of information shared by study participants was strictly applied to avoid any potential violation of confidentiality. Coding of names, school site location, and all other identifying information were kept on separate documents and locked in separate locations with restricted access. Contracting with individuals to transcribe interview sessions was an obvious time to focus on the need of confidentiality. Transcribers only saw codes for participant names and demographic information. Disposal of documents will occur via shredding at the CDE which has strict guidelines regarding confidentiality.

Chapter 3 Summary

Turning theory into action is essential if the field of education is to successfully evolve to meet the needs of all learners. From cradle to career, California educators have the responsibility to provide learners with instruction and learning environments based on research-based best practices. Young learners require that early childhood education developmentally appropriate practice be systematically, consistently, and successfully applied. This group of learners includes transitional kindergarten students. Creating theory, studying theory, and talking about theory is not enough. Action is required.

Discussion in this chapter has centered around two primary research questions:

1. How do California local education agency educators assigned to teach in transitional kindergarten classrooms describe the content, quality, and quantity of early childhood education and child development coursework in pre-service K–8 degree preparation programs and credential acquisition?

2. How do California local education agency educators assigned to teach in transitional kindergarten classrooms describe their experiences implementing research-based early childhood education developmentally appropriate practices in a TK classroom?

Theoretically, it has been established that all children are entitled to a free and appropriate public education. It has been established that “appropriate” means a *developmentally* appropriate education. It has further been established that children enrolled in transitional kindergarten classrooms across the state of California are largely provided educational services by teachers who are K–8, as opposed to early childhood, credentialed.

Chapter 3 discussion has identified the means by which K–8 credentialed TK teachers were solicited to participate in this study. Organization of preliminary paperwork and contact with participants, the importance of deep questioning during the interview process, acknowledgement of investigator biases and potential ethical concerns have been shared. Collection of data, including the necessary social, emotional, and psychological skills to conduct effective dialogue with participants, has been presented.

Disclosing how other researchers have approached similar studies has provided a frame of reference by which readers are provided an understanding of researcher intent. Study attributes, limitations, analysis procedures, validation and dependability concerns have been addressed.

As reiteration of the primary focus, paying closer attention to and modifying how K–8 teachers are prepared to implement ECE developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) in TK in LEA settings will move public school education policy and implementation further toward the intent of federal, state, and local goals of producing well-educated learners. Chapters 4 and Chapter 5 will provide insights into how practitioners interpret their own preparation to teach TK and the confidence with which they teach young learners.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results

Introduction to Chapter 4

To understand how California public school teachers assigned to transitional kindergarten (TK) classrooms perceive teacher preparation program outcomes (Research Question 1) and apply developmentally appropriate practice in classrooms (Research Question 2) with children of approximately four years of age, required thorough and deep one-on-one conversations. Twenty-three teachers participated in survey-taking, interviews, and documentation retrieval whereby they searched for academic transcripts (and provided these documents if available), and self-reflected on coursework completed. The study participants expressed personal attitudes, beliefs, and values about education in general and education specially related to the phenomenon of TK. Conflicts and collaboration, functioning within systems that may or may not have solicited their input, working amongst peers who may have or may not have similar beliefs, and internal struggles when reflecting on preparedness to teach TK emphasized the notion that education is a complicated social experience. Though complicated by anomalies, both broad and explicit discoveries can be made regarding the experiences of TK educators guided by two research questions:

1. How do California local education agency educators assigned to teach in transitional

kindergarten classrooms describe the content, quality, and quantity of early childhood education and child development coursework in pre-service K–8 degree preparation programs and credential acquirement?

2. How do California local education agency educators assigned to teach in transitional kindergarten classrooms describe their experiences implementing research-based early childhood education developmentally appropriate practices in a TK classroom?

Nine critical themes emerged during participant interviews:

1. Teacher Preparation Experiences (undergraduate degrees, credentialing, child development coursework, practicums and feelings of preparedness);
2. Current Teacher Challenges and Successes (curriculum, adult:child ratios, and assessments);
3. Learning through Play;
4. Classroom Environment (outdoor classroom, facilities, bathrooms, free choice centers);
5. Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) and Developmentally Inappropriate Practices (DIP) (behavior management, social-emotional learning, target v. continuum philosophies, standards and foundations, special education and/or retention or intervention);
6. Administrative Decisions Regarding Transitional Kindergarten Implementation;
7. Professional Learning Experiences and Opportunities (training that mattered, California Transitional Kindergarten Stipend program, Transitional Kindergarten Professional Learning, California Preschool Instructional Network TK workshops; and

8. Teachers' Policy Concerns (Grandfathering/Grandmothering, 24-unit requirement, perceptions about TK, marketing TK); and
9. Teacher anecdotes (teacher colleagues, report cards, names for TK students, and collaboration).

Chapter 4 is organized in linear fashion beginning with a discussion regarding study participants, followed by discussion focused on data collection methodology and analysis, findings and presentation of relevant data. Readers will be provided deep insights regarding TK in California and how teachers experienced the new phenomenon of transitional kindergarten.

Description of the Sample

Selected from a pool of over 8,000 TK teachers, participants were identified with the assistance of 11 California Preschool Instructional Network (CPIN) TK Leads. CPIN was awarded a \$10,000,000.00 contract by the California Department of Education (CDE) to develop both in-person and online professional learning (PL) modules. In an (unpublished) evaluative study conducted by Neuburger and Clark (2017), it was determined that during 2016 and 2017, 522 PL TK workshops were conducted throughout the state by the 11 CPIN Leads and additional certified trainers and were attended by 8,331 (duplicated) educators. Of these, 4,576 participants were TK teachers, 1,769 were state preschool teachers, and the remaining 1,986 included kindergarten teachers, special education teachers, curriculum specialists, instructional coaches, early childhood administrators, local education agency (LEA) site administrators (including principals, district and county-level administrators), school readiness coordinators, English language development specialists, and support staff who work with children of approximately four years of age.

During the roll-out of the TK PL modules, CPIN TK Leads were in direct and continuing contact with TK teachers. Some teachers participated in CPIN TK professional learning sessions while others enrolled in early childhood education coursework in institutions of higher education (IHEs) or other approved trainings in order to fulfill the mandate that requires California TK teachers to acquire a total of 24 units in early childhood education and/or child development. Leads were contacted by e-mail regarding this study to solicit the names of TK teachers who they believed would be sources of information about TK implementation and teacher preparation programs. Of the 11 CPIN TK Leads, seven provided the names of 40 potential study participants. Originally, it was planned that the study would require 10–12 participants; however, this changed when there was evidence of a high level of participation interest.

Of the 40 recommended teachers, 30 eligible teachers (based on the minimum number of two years assigned to a TK classroom and professional status with the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing), were contacted. Scheduling challenges eliminated seven of the potential participants leaving 23 TK teachers as the study sample.

Research Methodology and Analysis

Throughout the data collection process, transitional kindergarten teachers voiced eagerness to have their voices heard and while Chapter 3 indicated a much smaller population sampling, the decision was made to include more participants which could allow for important considerations. One consideration is that participants represented a greater number of California counties. Another consideration is that rural and highly populated areas were represented. Greater representation of age groups and the number of years teaching transitional kindergarten provided themes that may not have happened with a smaller population sample. This deviation from the protocol outlined in the previous chapter resulted in a wider understanding of teachers’

perspectives on preparation and implementation. Saturation, or the notion that no new information would be identified, on many topics was achieved. Such topics as the implementation practices of teacher colleagues, an understanding of target versus continuum thinking, report card challenges, and rich data related to TK professional learning offered through California Preschool Instructional Network may not have surfaced without the engagement of the larger study sample.

In order to interpret interview data, an assortment of coding strategies was employed. First and foremost, questioning rather than measuring was the primary data source. Study participants were viewed as TK experts and it is their subjective interpretation of the phenomenon that will bring readers to deep and broadened understanding about the multiple topics that have been coalesced to provide organization of nine primary and numerous secondary themes. It should be noted that coding software was not used to analyze collected data. This is significant when considering the voluminous data collected and was purposefully done to deepen the understanding of nuanced details provided by study participants. Few notes were taken during interviews as I focused on efficiently building a trusting relationship, becoming immersed in the participant “voice,” and diving deeply into the phenomenological experience.

The words of Tolley, Ulin, Mack, Robinson, and Succop (2016) rang true while coding and analyzing. “qualitative researchers typically begin with more general, open-ended questions moving toward greater precision as detailed information emerges. As data are collected, meanings begin to take shape making a preliminary analysis a necessary part of data collection” (p. 174). Preliminary analysis began after completion of the first interview.

Prior to mining the data for meaning, revisiting the study objectives, review of scholarly literature captured in Chapter 2 and realigning my thinking with the developed conceptual

framework were essential. It was with a stratified study population (those who participated in TK professional learning workshops developed by the California Department of Education and those who did not), delving into developmentally appropriate practice implementation was possible. Such stratification will provide readers with additional information about how effective teacher preparation in both professional development and professional learning experiences impacts classroom practice. (Professional development, as defined by the California Department of Education, is for those new to the education profession, while professional learning targets teachers who are established in the field.) Understanding the content of the CDE's TK professional learning (PL) sessions and later classroom application by workshop participants provides a basis for one of several choices teachers could make to attain the required 24 units, including "grandfathering" (or "grandmothering" as one study participant suggested due to the prominence of females in early childhood education), IHE coursework, and other approved PL sessions.

After the first three interviews were conducted and preliminarily coded, it was determined that the prepared interview questions and prompts were appropriate and would lead to rich, experiential data. Simultaneously, various first cycle coding strategies were emerging including in vivo coding, which can be described as "usually snappy words that are very telling and revealing. The term that is used expresses meaning in a way far better than any word that could be provided by the analyst" (Lewis-Beck, Bryman, & Lia, 2004, p. 528). Likewise, Manning (2017) suggested that "In vivo coding is championed by many for its usefulness in highlighting the voices of participants and for its reliance on the participants themselves for giving meaning to the data" (p. 1). Additionally, first cycle coding included theming and organizing the data by using an Excel spreadsheet matrix.

A variety of important themes became evident as data was extracted and coded from interview transcripts. Highlighting pertinent and meaningful comments recorded in the transcripts, copying these comments and then moving them to the matrix resulted in some themes taking on less meaning than originally thought and allowed for combining themes. Additionally, attribute coding regarding the location of the interview (library, classroom, coffee shop, etc.), duration of the interviews, county of employment, and referral source added to the framework of coding. Magnitude coding, which is a form of coding that “consists of and adds a supplemental alphanumeric or symbolic code or sub-code to an existing coded datum . . . to indicate its intensity, frequency, direction, presence, or evaluative content” (Saldaña, 2013, p. 72) resulted in a clearer understanding of specific themes.

Simultaneous coding including descriptive, in vivo, magnitude and attribute coding in Cycle 1 provided the foundation for Cycle 2 coding. Remembering that education is a social activity and that thought processes are often intertwined with emotional connections and internal dialogue, Cycle 2 coding included emotional and versus coding to further organize data.

Versus coding was needed when reviewing how study participants reflected on past experiences in teacher preparation, implementation of developmentally appropriate practice (DAP), and disagreements with administrative decision-making. “Versus coding is appropriate for policy studies, discourse analysis, and qualitative data sets that suggest strong conflicts within, between and among participants” (Saldaña, 2009, p. 99) of a phenomenon. In this study, conflict between TK teachers and site administrators, conflict with other-grade peers, and conflict between TK teachers that became evident and will be discussed more in the next section. Incorporating Saldaña’s (2009) study, Higgins (2014) suggested “The rationale for adopting this approach to the coding was that versus coding provided a framework to explicate the contrasting

codings by creating a thematic structure of opposing themes within which the codes were situated” (p. 4). Such opposing themes became evident in comparing administrative guidance and requirements versus what teachers believed to be true in developmentally appropriate practice.

Study participants appeared to be in a continuous state of evaluating TK as a policy, as a profession, as a new education program, as a mandate, and as a paradigm intended to improve outcomes for children. Evaluation coding became an important strategy. Study participants regularly made “judgements about the merit and worth of programs or policy” (Rallis & Rossman, 2003, as cited by Saldaña, 2009, p. 102) and were deeply considering “activities, characteristics, and outcomes of programs to make judgements about the program, improve program effectiveness, and/or inform decisions about future planning” (Patton, 2002, as cited by Saldaña, 2009, p. 102). Further explaining the value of this type of coding, Onwuegvuzie, Frels, and Hwang (2016) noted “Evaluation Codes can be generated to provide recommendations for further research and practice stemming from findings. By examining evaluation codes, a reviewer can identify the gap between previous and current studies and generate a research question(s)” (p. 145).

Summary of Findings

Theme 1: Teacher preparation experiences. Study participants suggested that the teacher preparation programs they completed inadequately prepared them to teach. Additionally, most did not feel prepared to teach children in early childhood programs such as transitional kindergarten. Several participants expressed general satisfaction and a sense of preparedness; however, all participants indicated how preparation programs could improve. Participants provided details about the content, quality, and quantity of early childhood education (ECE) and

child development (CD) coursework on the path toward attaining a K–8 teaching credential. Of the 23 participants, seven attained 4-year degrees in areas other than education which included no courses in ECE or CD. The remaining participants completed undergraduate work in education or a closely related field (e.g., child psychology); however, many reflected that their preparation program did not include any courses in ECE or CD. While two participants were able recall a “general” course on CD, the content included human development, rather than content specific to the ages 0–8.

Embedded within some preparation programs that study participants completed, was a practicum element. Like preparation coursework, however, 20 out of 23 participants did not feel that the practicum experiences were beneficial. Practicums were perceived to be inadequate because of the duration of the placement (too short), the inadequacy of engagement opportunities (observing rather than teaching), the instructional quality of the classroom teacher, the lack of protocol clarity when conducting classroom observations, dated instructional materials, and instructors who had not themselves been teachers in early education or elementary settings.

Three participants did find value in their practicum experiences. They valued classroom observations because they had been given specific observation protocol (e.g., what to look for, how to code observations, assistance in interpretation of data collected during observations). These participants shared that they perceived the assigned master teachers to be highly skilled, informative, supportive, reflective, and encouraging.

Meaningful to participants was the unofficial preparational experiences they encountered. These experiences included helping their own parents who were teachers during the participants’ middle and high school years, volunteering in community programs for children, giving birth to and raising children and watching developmental milestones, observing other teachers,

experiences as a preschool teacher prior to attaining a credential, and attending professional development opportunities during off-track months. These experiences, as indicated by study participants, were the most meaningful in terms of feeling prepared to teach.

Theme 2: Current teacher challenges and successes. Twenty of 23 participants indicated that a challenge for them is adult:child ratios. While three of 23 teachers experienced class sizes under 12 children, the majority indicated that, not only were they assigned large groups of children (16–32 children), they often did not have instructional assistants to support the TK program. Most teachers (15 of 23, or 65%) expressed frustration with administrative decisions regarding class sizes and the perceived inability to fully apply DAP. With one adult to oversee and manage the behavior of many children, teacher burn-out was shared. Feelings of frustration about lacking the time to build relationships, a preponderance of whole group instruction, and spending time teaching acceptable school behavior rather than having sufficient time for small group and 1:1 support, left many study participants feeling anxious about the effectiveness of instruction.

Similarly, many participants discussed assessment demands as challenging. Echoing an oft held concern about “teaching to the test,” participants shared concerns and frustrations with the types of assessments required by district administration. Some assessments are intended for children older than TK children; some are curriculum-based and lack the depth of understanding that teachers need about non-content skills, particularly social-emotional and self-regulation skills. Teachers shared frustration about the time-intensity of assessments and increased stress for both children and teachers. They shared that computerized assessments, also, caused stress for both children and teachers due to various factors including lack of keyboard skills, the need for close monitoring, and the apparent unrelatedness of assessment prompts to desired outcomes.

Several participants did discuss the Desired Results Development Profile (DRDP) assessment tools as being helpful, meaningful, and connected to early learning outcomes.

The third area of this theme became evident as teachers talked about what they teach and why. Six of the 23 (26%) participants used published curricular tools as required by the district while others had the freedom to choose instructional materials and instructional approaches. Some shared that the curricular tools were not intended, in their minds, for children of approximately four years of age, but rather for older children and that modifying these resources to meet the needs of their TK students was time-intensive and often ineffective. This ineffectiveness sometimes caused participants to say that they do not use the “required” curriculum, but rather supplement and supplant it with what they believed to be the most useful.

Theme 3: Learning through play. Universally (100%), study participants opined that providing opportunities for play was essential for an effective and developmentally appropriate TK classroom learning environment; however, delving deeper it was revealed that five of the 23 (22%) teachers embrace “intentional play” as learning opportunities while others appeared to have less appreciation for the value of play as evidenced in daily practice. Play, defined sometimes as “free choice,” allowed for children in some of the classrooms to self-determine which available activities to engage in, yet other children were required to sit in assigned seats with teacher-assigned activities erroneously identified as play. Some teachers tightly limit exploration opportunities while others allow children completely unstructured play. Referencing “Mr. Rogers,” numerous teachers indicated that “the work of childhood is play.” Teachers expressed frustration with believing that others in their local educational agency see “play” and “academics” as opposites, when they are not.

As one participant suggested, play can be messy. Many teachers indicated that they had to let go of the notion that “everything has a place, and everything is in its’ place” way of thinking. If a child wanted to take the rubber dinosaurs out of the dedicated science area to the building block area so that she could build “homes” and create a community of dinosaurs, it would be acceptable for some of the participants. For (a few) others, children were required to play with things in a designated area only. For most teachers ($n = 18$ or 78%), although not all, allowing children the freedom to interact with (play with) classroom resources in a way that was meaningful to them was encouraged; however, for some teachers in the study, organizing rotational groups when “these” children get to use only these resources (e.g., science area resources) and “those” children get to use only those resources (e.g., books), seemed to be designed for classroom organization and containment of resources rather than intentional instruction based on child interest and motivation. Eight (or 35%) participants shared actual sadness for children in kindergarten and first grade who did not have opportunities for intentional, self-chosen activities saying that kindergarten children who do have this advantage seem to do better academically long-term.

Theme 4: Classroom environment. This theme encompasses not only the indoor classroom area including furniture and square footage, but also outdoor classrooms (sometimes imprecisely referred to as “playgrounds”), bathroom accessibility, school facilities in general, and shared spaces such as school entry and egress areas, parking lots and hallways. Teachers focused heavily on classroom set-up and offering a learning space to children that is engaging, based on assessment data to intentionally plan play (learning potentialities), and providing children with opportunities for individual, small group, and whole group activities. Some participants expressed disappointment regarding limited classroom resources and the need for

teachers to use personal funds or organize fund-raising to purchase classroom resources. Others shared that classroom furniture provided by the district were not appropriately sized for children of TK age and that bathrooms were located as far as three hallways away from the classroom leaving children, who are still developing control of their body, vulnerable to accidents.

Some (three of 23 or 13%) teachers did express thankfulness that local administrators support TK programs and value TK teacher input regarding supplies, furniture, and space. Most, but not all, participants shared they arranged the physical learning space by dedicated content areas . . . science, nature, art, literacy, mathematics, and life skills (formally referred to as “housekeeping”) areas. Maintaining children’s interest while correlating the physical space to instruction was a consistent theme revealed during study interviews.

Concern was elevated when teachers talked about entry/egress areas and outside space. A few participants shared actual fear about their students getting lost or hurt when coming into or going out of school in areas shared by older children. Similar to sharing playground space, teachers were concerned about the risk of little children being unintentionally hurt by older, more physically adept children in grades above TK. Individually and with or without the support of site administrators, many teachers took it upon themselves to develop safe entry/egress by mandating that parents deliver and pick up their children at the classroom door. Observations before and after interview at school sites indicated that the fear is justifiable for a few of the teachers participating in the study.

Looming large in this theme was the need for adequate outdoor space for children to explore nature, develop large muscle skills, foster positive social collaboration skills, and bring indoor classroom activities to the outdoors. As TK classrooms are located on campuses designed for children older than TK age, climbing apparatuses and equipment with wheels (e.g., bicycles

and wagons) are frequently inadequate or present safety concerns. While two teachers (8%) teachers were content with the outdoor classroom space, many more commented on the district-inflicted barriers that prevent usable and engaging outdoor space such as requirements to obtain approval for painting “roads” and lanes on playground surfaces, lack of funding for appropriately-sized equipment, and a lack of understanding by school and district staff regarding the need for children to have time outdoors in order to expand and enhance learning opportunities.

Theme 5: Developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) and developmentally inappropriate practices (DIP). Developmentally appropriate practice (DAP), for many of the study participants, was the essential ingredient for a successful TK program. “Successful” for participants was defined as children showing high levels of proficiency for kindergarten readiness. While focused on a continuum of learning rather than specified targets for all children to meet at the same time, participants were generally, but not universally, aware of the elements that are developmental for children in this age group. Some teachers provide scaffolded learning opportunities based on their interpretation of what children can do without reaching a level of frustration. Some teachers used clinical language in describing child development continuums in content areas and others used language learned from K–3 settings that they believe applied to TK children. Some teachers talked about parents and preschool programs who may or may not have, in their opinion, sufficiently prepared young children by teaching them the alphabet or how to count to ten or how to get along with others. Other teachers talked about DAP as a highly complex undertaking that incorporates teachers’ academic knowledge about early learning, assessment data as a driver for instruction and intervention, the classroom as a “teacher,” the need to enhance language skills (both in the home language and English), and intentional play.

When discussing DAP, teachers talked about themselves. When talking about developmentally inappropriate practice (DIP), most study participants talked about other teachers and what they perceive is happening in other classrooms. Several teachers, however, described how their early teaching practices in TK were, indeed, inappropriate. As these teachers participated in professional learning, they became aware of DIP in their own practice and sought to mitigate this by applying what they learned and modifying their practice.

Speaking with identifiable emotion, many participants shared anecdotes about seeing DIP in classrooms outside of their own. Discussions about worksheets, sitting in assigned seating throughout the school day, interacting with resources only when the teacher approved, spelling lists, requiring children to use narrow pencils, the lack of music or art, inappropriate homework, excessive screen (computer) time, instruction without realia or manipulatives, TK/K combination classes with instruction focused on kindergarten content standard mastery, retention of children in TK when their personal developmental continuum does not match standards, raising one's hand to speak and waiting for the teacher to indicate that the child could talk, expecting children to behave appropriately at "carpet time" and being removed if did not comply with the rules, using "canned" curriculum, and artwork that looks the same as the model or it is deemed "wrong." Study participants were verbose when talking about DIP.

Theme 6: Administrative decisions regarding transitional kindergarten implementation. Similarly, study participants were verbose when responding to interview questions and prompts about school and district administration, decision-making protocol, and influences from outside of the classroom. Participants shared that when a site administrator does not have knowledge of child development, early childhood education or DAP and DIP, there is a negative impact on TK DAP delivery. Teachers talked about the focus on "numbers";

administrative focus on filling classrooms to capacity with children to maintain or increase average daily attendance (ADA) funding. A lack of administrative guidance regarding TK program implementation, a lack of understanding about the behaviors exhibited by children in the TK age group, early entrance decision-making, curriculum and assessment mandates, and site administrators being barriers to DAP.

Conversely, a minority of teacher participants indicated that both site and district level administrators were overtly supportive, understood DAP, provided essential classroom resources, and advocated for TK DAP in staff and board meetings. Seven (or 30%) teachers indicated that while their administrators did not provide guidance, they did support teachers as decision-makers and program implementers. Sometimes this meant that administrators trusted the TK teacher to define, implement, and evaluate their own TK program without administrator involvement.

Theme 7: Professional learning experiences and opportunities. Teachers who needed to attain additional CD and/or ECE units (most participants) to reach the 24-unit legislative requirement to teach TK, talked about how they complied with the law. Approximately half of the participants indicated that they participated in professional development (PD), conferences, staff development, and institute of higher education (IHE) coursework. Some participants were “grandfathered” into TK with no additional requirements for units as determined by site and/or district review of experience and/or academic transcripts. Teachers anecdotally shared that colleagues were given credit by site principals for coursework unrelated to education and early childhood education specifically.

Study participants discussed seeking out PD and professional learning (PL) opportunities on their own, participating in district-designed PL, having TK coaches guide program implementation, observing other TK teachers, attending single-event TK and kindergarten

conferences, observing their own children at home, and collaborating with peers as means by which to improve teaching skills and ensure that DAP was deeply embedded in their practice. Some teachers talked about the ineffectiveness of district-designed and required PD and PL. They also talked about the lack of substitute teachers, the lack of funding to support teachers' attendance at high-quality PD and PL, and the lack of opportunities specifically related to TK.

To the contrary of these experiences, the stratified population (12 of 23 or 52%) of participants who participated in TK PL opportunities funded by the California legislature and designed by the California Department of Education (CDE) in collaboration with the Sacramento County Office of Education's (SCOEs) Preschool Instructional Network (CPIN), shared important insights. While one participant indicated that these sessions were not particularly helpful to her, all others who participated in some or all of the sessions, perceived the trainings as necessary, valuable and crucial to their application of DAP. Under contract with the CDE, CPIN used existing PL modules based on the preschool learning foundations (known as "grade levels standards" in K–12), to develop modules pertinent to TK. Several teachers indicated that participating in these modules was the only catalyst for understanding and implementing DAP. While a comment was shared that it felt as though the CPIN trainer did not always understand K–12 protocol, the content related to child development was essential and provided edification she did not receive in her preparation program, PD, or PL.

Theme 8: Teachers' policy concerns. In other themes, discussion about teachers' concerns on a variety of TK topics were investigated and highlighted. Additionally, teachers shared concerns about the outcomes of TK legislation and policy decision-making, as identified in this theme. From suggesting the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing develop a pathway toward an ECE specialization or actual credential to increased marketing about TK to

parents and other stakeholders to limiting trailer bills often attached to education-related legislation to providing pro-active preparation of teachers to the development of new mandates to support the implementation of DAP, study participants shared their experiences with, opinions about, and understanding of TK law.

Theme 9: Teacher anecdotes. Interview data included personal anecdotes about TK teacher colleagues, collaboration successes and failures, kindergarten teacher responses to the preparedness of TK children, differing teacher expectations, differing expectations of site administrators, and experiences with early entrance children who were not yet toilet-trained and labeling children as special education children before they had been given the opportunity to respond to DAP and intervention. Such anecdotes provided me, and will provide the reader, with deeper layers of understanding about teachers' experiences with the phenomenon of TK.

Presentation of Data and Results

Providing data summaries is essential in detecting and revealing the abstruseness of the transitional kindergarten phenomenon in California. While there are multiple names for programs that serve children of approximately four years of age, California is unique in adopting a program that is embedded within the K–12 system of public education. Using multiple layers of coding strategies and using source data provided by study participants, the findings remain complicated in form, challenging in concept, and even problematic for stakeholders invested in the TK phenomenon. A return to the nine themes that emerged during coding procedures will be the most reliable means by which organize data.

Theme 1: Teacher preparation experiences. Participants provided detail about the content, quality, and quantity of ECE and CD coursework on the path toward attaining a K–8 teaching credential. One-third of the participants of the participants, attained 4-year degrees in

areas other than education which included no courses in ECE or CD. The remaining 16 participants did complete undergraduate work in education or a closely related field (e.g., child psychology), however, many reflected that their preparation program did not include any courses on ECE or CD. While two participants were able recall a “general” course on childhood development, the content included human development, rather than content specific to the ages 0–8. Two of four participants with a degree or concentration in ECE, reflected that coursework inadequately prepared them to teach children (at any level). Three participants indicated that the ECE courses they completed helped to solidify a career path, but only one of these three believed that coursework prepared her to effectively teach.

Like preparation coursework, most participants did not feel that the practicum experiences were beneficial. One participant relayed this about her practicum experience: “It was horrible, I was scared to death.” Likewise, another participant admitted her trepidation and internal worry when stating “I went home, and I cried every day. They absolutely don’t teach you (behavior management).” Practicums were perceived to not be beneficial for more than two-thirds of the participants; however, three did find value in having specific observation protocol, instruction on how to code data and assistance in data interpretation. Being assigned to highly skilled master teachers was highlighted by these three participants. All three relayed that they had been shown and had the opportunity to practice (while under the watchful eye of a master teacher) the skills of observation and were offered guidance and technical assistance as they determined what the observation data meant in terms of the development of individual children.

Unofficial preparation experiences were shared by multiple participants. One participant reflected that, “I did my training basically, with [my son’s teacher]. That was during the days of developmentally appropriate kindergarten. I was absolutely blindsided. If I hadn’t had the

experiences that I had, I wouldn't know what to do." A participant who teaches in a large metropolitan area shared that the most meaningful TK preparation came from both the district and collaboration with peers. "Then [school district] allowed us to see other TK classrooms that were amazing because to me and you can show me in a video, but I want to meet these teachers." But for another participant, meaningful training to enhance her TK skills came from professional development opportunities that she sought out and paid for personally. "So, even when times were super tight, and nobody was going anywhere, I felt like that's my profession and I have to invest in my practice."

Several participants indicated that meaningful experiential training was found in the TK classroom itself beginning with one teacher who suggested, "I mean that's one of the best things . . . these coaches. Everybody that came to the district had to go through effective first teaching strategies. You had your coach. They modeled. Then, it was one strategy a week and then you had to bring it back into your classroom. They came in and observed you and your lesson."

Likewise, another participant relayed that experiential training was found in the form of "Tutoring, always tutoring. [I] worked in the child development lab. I did a lot of preschool teaching, library story hour readers for preschool. I worked at a group home for developmentally disabled adults. I worked as an aide for kindergarten, then I worked as an aide for the County School District teaching outdoor education. And so, all my life, I've been teaching."

Theme 2: Current teacher practices, challenges and successes. Some participants used purchased curriculum. "Let's not talk about curriculum!" one teacher protested. "They give us curriculum that doesn't make sense. Can we make our jobs easier by making sure that curriculum [is developed] by teachers?" She continued, "[The district] used [publisher] because there is an

online version. Never mind that it has a lot of mistakes. Never mind that they teach one little standard and [children are] supposed to learn it in one day.”

Teachers voiced frustration with curricular choices made without their input. ““You must do this curriculum.’ And, I said, ‘Excuse me, but the preschool learning foundation has one that’s integrated’. [The district] said, ‘No, you have to do this’” revealed a teacher. Another relayed “we did a curriculum adoption and everyone in K–5 got all new curriculum, nothing for TK.” One of the more novice teachers in the study suggested “They picked a program that feeds into kinder all the up. I use it when I want to. The math is garbage. It’s not developmentally appropriate.” Similarly, another relayed that she uses some preschool materials, but “that’s my dilemma because [preschool] is not TK and it’s not kindergarten and I don’t want it to be the same as kindergarten.” Adding that “a lot of the pre-K things are just a bit below the students.”

“Kinder teachers have curriculum and pacing guides they must follow. Teaching sight words in the second week of school to four-year old [children], they don’t even know their letters. I looked at it and laughed.” Another shared that “My math is new and it’s the same as K. I don’t use it that often. Williams [state compliance] reviewers were here, so we had to have it out.” Another teacher declared more strongly that “I designed the program. I implement the program. The program is whatever it is what I say it is.”

Compared to programs that children participate in outside of local education agencies (LEAs), TK study participants raised adult:child ratios as a concern. In LEAs currently, adult:child ratios are determined by local decision-makers. Participants described the impact of ratio decisions: “In preschool you have requirements of 8:1. In TK I know a teacher with 32 with no aide. Kinder matches TK, but can go up to 29 [with no] aides . . . there’s only one of me and there’s 30 of them.” Another added “We’re just lumping them with K. So, basically, 26 kids in

your class.” Another agreed. “24 is too many. They’re little and they need another lap, or another person to put a band-aid on or somebody to listen to them. Otherwise all I’m doing is managing. I’m not getting to build relationships, which is so important.”

One teacher shared a similar sentiment. “I had 28. The other teacher had 22. I don’t know how that shook up. But I had 28, and I had a little girl that had a walker [and] leg braces. And my classroom is not that big. I don’t even have a bathroom in my class because TK was an afterthought. The two kinders have bathrooms. I do not. Last year when I had those 28, I just remember talking to my principal and being like, ‘Can we get an aide so that at least we just have another pair of eyes?’ And he was like, ‘the district's really not going to. They won't fund it.’”

Other participants discussed how a second adult can impact program implementation. One reflected that her district said the ‘need [is for] (classroom aides) to help other classrooms because we all have big classes’, but what I heard is that my students aren’t as important as K and 1st. I’m going to have two different adults, and these are the little ones that need the most help and support, and they don’t need to have two different people,” referencing building emotional skills through relationships with consistent adults. Even when a district provided consistent instructional assistants, participants described experiences regarding the disposition, skills, and ECE knowledge of classroom aides. “I had aides yelling at kids, ‘Your teacher said to get in line NOW!’ I had another one that was an expert on everything and didn’t want to engage with kids.”

Adult:child ratios impact not only DAP implementation, behavior management, and the teacher’s ability to provide exploratory areas in the classroom, but also how administering assessments may cause challenges. One participant shared frustration with mandated assessments. “It’s a one-on-one test and the same test that they’re doing for kindergartners.

There's no choice. We were told two weeks ago we had to do it, and it's due next Friday. And so, we have to test every single one of our students. Mailbox? Telephone? (two of the words children are presented to read), except it's all electronic. We don't all sit at desks. We work in groups. We collect natural data. And so, this goes against the DRDP. And then this is one that they're supposed to be able to point to the picture that has the sound that you give them."

The DRDP for readers who may not be familiar, are formative, observation-based assessment tools. As indicated on the CA Department of Education's website, "the DRDP (2015) is administered in natural settings through teacher observations, family observations, and examples of children's work. Ongoing documentation of children's knowledge and skills in everyday environments is a recommended practice for early childhood assessment (p. 54)." Additionally, "The DRDP is aligned with all volumes of the California's Infant/Toddler and Preschool Learning and Development Foundations, the Common Core Standards, and the Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework (p. 4)." More information may be found at: <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/ci/documents/drdp2015preschool.pdf>.

Several participants talked about assessing children in general and noted time taken away from instruction and exploratory activities for children. "They have tests that they have to [administer], end of the year tests, and so they're teaching to the test. They don't have the time to take out those manipulatives for them to really learn." Another teacher's discussion went further:

Three times a year everyone must get on computers, including TK. There are 46 questions on the computer each. You have to do it . . . that's abuse making these kids sit down . . . for one, not many of them know how to use a mouse. The district says, 'kids have to do it' and yet they can't.

One interviewee shared concern about how assessment results are used. “We do the assessments but what would happen is those kids that were really struggling, the teachers are like, “We’re retaining them in kinder,” far more because now the standards are more rigorous.” Another participant too, had concerns about why assessments are a challenge. “Because we’re worried about [publicized] scores and you’re worried about because I read report cards, and they’re not the same scores.” This teacher was implying that the scores on assessments do not appear to be correlated to report card information. A different approach to assessment was discussed by several participants including this comment: “So, one of the things I do is I certainly do lots of assessing; both informal and formal to determine what the concept level is and then when it comes to an explicit instruction, they are grouped by that.”

Some study participants shared experiences with administering the Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP). While some participants were not aware of the DRDP, other teachers use the DRDP regularly and with fidelity. One conveyed her enthusiasm when stating “I love the DRDP-K. That’s my bible. I have a new principal this year. It’s the first thing I’m going to bring out: the DRDP-K. DRDP-K drives our program. We’re so lucky!”

Connected directly to assessment outcomes, TK teachers must contend with vocabulary differences between ECE and local education agencies (LEAs). K–12 education stakeholders in California often use the word “standards,” while ECE uses the word “foundations” which, actually, have the same meaning. “There’s a disconnect” relayed one participant. “They (LEA teachers) can’t get past the word ‘foundations’ and they can’t get past the word ‘preschool’ (‘standards’ are also known as ‘grade level standards’ and ‘foundations’ are also known as ‘preschool foundations’). Another noted that “the Preschool Foundations . . . that’s the first thing that [county office of education] gave us” suggesting the county understood that the foundations

are actually the grade level standards for TK. One teacher expanded on the need for foundations/standards in TK:

That's a big difference with TK and K. In TK you're exposing them to the standards, and they're supposed to developmentally hit the preschool learning foundations with a certain amount of success by the end of TK. In kindergarten, they only have that year to master standards. There's a big difference between the words 'exposure' and 'master.' Still, [TK] teachers don't understand the Preschool Learning Foundations.

Including discussion of study participants' perceptions of and experiences with curriculum, classroom and outdoor learning environments, adult-child ratios, assessments, standards and foundations, provides a path toward initial understanding of the findings related to the second research question: How do California local education agency educators assigned to teach in transitional kindergarten classrooms describe their experiences implementing research-based early childhood education developmentally appropriate practices in a TK classroom? The next four sub-sections add additional depth regarding the complexity of understanding and implementing developmentally appropriate practice (DAP).

Theme 3: Learning through play. Participants described the importance of play in a TK classroom. "They are creating their own ideas. They're using their imagination and creating their own thing, and they end up teaching me how to do it. I learn and watch and see what they like and learn from them. So, I make it to where they're really in charge." Another suggested that teachers "be ok with letting them have that play time because that's how kids learn is through play. That's them learning for TK. That's the curriculum." Most of the participants recognized the play-based learning is essential in TK, but for different reasons.

Participants discussed the importance of intentional play. “If we called it developmental discovery, I think we could do it that way” and “I like intentional play! One of my former students from 1st grade asked, ‘do you guys just play all day?’ I say, ‘We do. We really do.’” Another participant explained it differently. “Instead of saying ‘Let’s take two triangles. See what you can make,’ I just put them all out. If they discover it on their own, it has meaning to them. The language that comes out of them . . . it’s spontaneous.” Learning about and using language was a critical component for study participants.

Some study participants described how they focus on the purpose of play in specific situations. One teacher’s advice to new TK teachers was “Don’t just say, ‘Play with the blocks.’ Give them instructions on how to and make it faster, slower, taller, bigger-, and really work on social-emotional. Academics are important, but social-emotional, learning through play, those are your most important themes.” Likewise, another relayed, “(center-based play) is kind of a very abstract idea. A lot of times people think, ‘Oh, these are centers and we’re gonna do patterning. And, that might be true. I call it jobs. That is how they learn is by being in an unstructured play environment.” Using words and phrases in place of “play,” according to participants, more accurately capture what children are doing.

Lastly, one teacher’s remarks regarding play were reflective of current research. “But my first year I almost felt guilty, which is so sad. You can play in the kitchen, when I felt like we need to be [phonetically] blending. I do blend with my TKs toward the end of the year but none of it is required. [I tell parents] how critical play is and the research that’s gone into play. When I first [started] teaching TK, I really had to teach them how to build a tower because they’re so used to their iPhones and their computers.” Suggesting that the learning environment in which

children are offered intentional play opportunities is important, interview data regarding Theme 4 is presented next.

Theme 4: Classroom environment. Along with curricular choices, study participants felt that both classroom and outdoor spaces are critical in DAP for young children. It appeared that there is a wide range of classroom and outdoor space design in California's TK classrooms. A study participant described coming into a TK classroom that had been newly assigned to her. "The room was completely unacceptable. It was a bungalow with no windows. The sink was too high. They couldn't get a drink of water or wash their hands, and the bathroom was three hallways away." A veteran TK teacher shared that when "I first started here, [the children] were supposed to sit at [ill-fitting] tables. I had to fight, and fight, and fight, and fight. I'm a strong believer that the classroom; the environment is the third teacher." Another participant believed this as well and had even more to say about classroom environments for young children:

[A TK coach] came in, and said, 'So, how old are the kids you're going to be working with?' I said, 'Well, they are 4 turning 5.' And she said, 'Right, well how tall are they? So, your tables are set up for first graders. Did you wanna do something about that?' The expectation is not that you will fit into my table, but that my table will fit into you.

Two teachers measured effectiveness by how children used the various areas in the classroom. "I had a little guy named Nathan who would come over and I had little white rockers in there, and he's rocking in the chair. 'Nathan, tell me about the book that you're enjoying.' 'This is one my Mom reads to me, and I'm just remembering her voice.'" A similar view was shared by a fellow TK teacher. "I like to call this my art and writing center because things often start [out] as art, and then art turns into writing, and then writing comes back into art, there's a flow to it. The environment is everything." Recalling how children use identified spaces in

unique ways, many participants discussed how children think differently about the spaces than the adult who created the spaces.

When discussing the importance that many study participants placed on the role of the classroom environment in TK, one communicated that she uses round tables in the classroom while, “a lot of kinder classrooms have desks or rectangular tables. The setup of their classroom is structured very differently. I have a kitchen; many of our classrooms don’t have a kitchen. I have a lot of blocks and Legos which we use daily. We’re still covering letters, sounds, sight words, numbers, basic addition using counters but not the paper pencil addition.” A TK colleague added additional rationale for having a developmentally appropriate classroom design. Many of her students are English learners who speak no English. “In observing the classroom environment, I’m very aware of the centers. There’s the drama center, there’s the block area, there are areas for Play-Doh, there’s a lot of the sensory . . . there’s like a little science center. I don’t care what language they speak in my class . . . it’s about getting them to use that language.”

With more than 60% of interviews conducted in the TK classrooms of study participants, diversity in classroom arrangements was observed. From the lens of Title 5 (California Department of Education) and Title 22 (California Department of Social Services), which are required guidelines for California state-funded preschools (including children of approximately four years of age), some TK (which also serve children of approximately four years of age) classrooms could be viewed as wholly developmentally appropriate, while others were primarily and generally appropriate. Two classrooms did not appear to meet Title 5 or Title 22 guidelines in appropriateness. Those that appeared to be primarily or generally appropriate could improve the suitability of the classroom by lowering visual resources to the eye level of children, providing

furniture of appropriate height and size, removing clutter, reconfiguring specialized learning areas, placing safety caps on electrical sockets, eliminating loose electrical cords, and heavy objects that could easily be tipped over. While not required of local education agencies, Title 22 requires at least 35 square feet per child which was not evident in all classrooms visited.

Unlike discussions revolving around indoor classroom spaces and the provision of developmentally appropriate exploratory areas, learning tools, realia, appropriate furniture, group and individual spaces, study participants had very few positive remarks about the outdoor classroom spaces TK children have available. Teachers were unaware that for four-year old children in state-funded preschool programs, 75 square feet of outdoor space is required for each child. They did know, however, that other factors made the outdoor spaces inappropriate as well. A fairly new teacher indicated that “I find that [having an appropriate outdoor area is] really hard to do in a K–6 school. The kinder playgrounds can be barren landscapes and you have to share your space with kinder, and the kinder teachers don’t necessarily want that.” Similarly, a long-time teacher remarked that “I was trying to focus on our yard because it is so sad. It’s asphalt and it’s inappropriate, too-tall jungle gym, kind of a thing. And really nothing else out there. Our playgrounds are atrocious. They are very inappropriate playgrounds. It’s just awful.”

Indoor and outdoor spaces impact the degree to which (DAP) can be applied. The second research question, how do California local education agency educators assigned to teach in transitional kindergarten classrooms describe their experiences implementing research-based early childhood education developmentally appropriate practices in a TK classroom, prompted interview questions about classroom spaces and provides insights into the challenges TK teachers have experienced and are experiencing in local education agencies.

Theme 5: Developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) and developmentally inappropriate practices (DIP). As discussed in preceding chapters, DAP is essential in early childhood classrooms. From study interviews, it appears that some (eight of 23 or 35%) TK teachers do fully understand what DAP is and what it looks like, but others do not. Some participants used clichés, some talked around the subject, some used classroom examples of what they believe DAP is, and some could only define the phrase with words from the phrase. Some participants seem to confuse DAP with classroom management, classroom organization or scheduling, “They can probably do something similar to what they did in kindergarten, but I might do it for a whole week and they might be a day.” From another participant, “Setting things up so that there are enough of everything, so they’re not fighting over the glue sticks. They’re able to reach things.” This participant, too, did not seem to fully understand DAP when stating “I think is we work with markers like pencils and stuff, but mostly everything is just hands on learning.”

Looking to participants who appeared to more fully understand both the concept of and the need for DAP, explained DAP differently. “The majority of teachers are new to TK so I’m getting them to change the schedule, offering choice, flexibility, and creating centers. If I can get those new teachers doing more DAP, I feel I can get the older TK teachers on board.” Likewise, another participant did not directly define DAP, but spoke about what it looks like. “There was a time frame when we were told not to do art, music, or hands-on [activities]. You’ve got to teach sight words, and you gotta do this and do that. I quietly closed my doors and I did my music and art. It’s ludicrous to even think about not doing art and music and not valuing its importance.”

Another participant explained DAP by what she believes *it is not* and by holding up K as the antithesis of DAP. “Part of the problem for early education teachers is they have to

understand and be okay with the chaos and I don't mean it has to be out of control and lack discipline, but it's gonna be messy. That's instruction in TK, whereas now in K it's a solid 60-minute math block, a 60-minute [English language arts] block. And don't forget that 20-minute mandatory time on the computer. They are hurting the babies in kinder."

Several participants were able to define DAP academically. While discussing what she believed DAP to be, one included constructive criticism of both preparation programs and the practices of fellow teachers. "I would say, 'Your child, when he was a baby, you didn't make him crawl on the ground because your friend's child was about the same age and he was crawling on the ground. You didn't move his legs and arms to make him crawl because you couldn't because he wasn't ready at that time. And we have some people that might have a different kind of degree, and not even a Liberal Studies degree and so they didn't study ECE. They passed tests and got a job teaching.'" Another reflection on DAP differed slightly. "When you have 32 kids and not all of these kids come in with the same experiences or at the same developmental level, the exposure; just exposure to language, exposure to doing things at home, playing in the mud, playing in the sand, just running. You see these problems begin to . . . affect their learning. They fall behind because they haven't had time to experiment with coloring, playing, developing fine motor skills."

Most teachers in the study reflected on the outcomes of DIP in classrooms outside of their own. "In K it's worksheet-driven and parents are like, 'Where are the worksheets?' I'm like, 'I'm sorry, it looks a little different in TK.'" Similarly, another participant described what DIP is by saying what DAP is not.

For 20 minutes, they are required to get a penguin from the right to the left on the screen. There's no conversation. Not a sound. Not even any kind of verbal cue. It's just

touching [the screen]. We're asking kids to master computer skills and not to develop their language. If they don't develop language, they're not going to read. If they don't read, they're not going to be good at anything. (Unnamed study participant)

A participant reflected that "What I've heard is that many TKs aren't very different than K or it's a combo class. TK was not designed to be a combo class." Another shared concerns by saying "when they say, it's dumbing it down' I just think that person doesn't have the understanding that not everybody is given the same opportunities." "Some TK teachers are really doing inappropriate things, and it's gonna be a bad influence on kids" suggested another teacher. "Not only is it just bad instructionally, but later on when those children are labeled as behavior problems or special ed it was because of this (DIP) not because of them" she expanded.

Expanding on the outcomes of DIP, two participants were verbose. "I don't agree with much of what a kindergartener is expected to learn in today's system. Reading and writing are very teacher directed, "canned" curriculum. Not much science or social science. Art is mostly cutesy or crafty. Not much time for children just to be independently creative. Too much requirement to sit still in assigned seats. Very little dramatic play. Water play, sand play, finger-painting not allowed; it's too messy. The only music they get is singing and dancing to pre-recorded music. No experiences with instruments."

Another participant suggested that the difference between DAP and DIP can be best explained by describing her experience at a Back-to-School Night event for parents of TK children. "I passed out the worksheets, and I said, 'This is a kindergarten lesson . . . G says grapes, say it with me . . . grape. My turn. Grape. Your turn. Grape. Now, pick up your crayon and color the grapes.'" The teacher passed out crayons to parents to color the worksheet. "'Well, kinders' she shared with parents, 'are gonna [color] black grapes, and whatever because they

don't know what they don't know. A lot of kids have never even tasted a grape.' So, I gave them two minutes, and then we stopped. I said, 'Now I'm going to teach you the TK version.'" She brought out plastic grapes and real grapes. "These are grapes. What colors do you see?" You know, some [children] can name [the colors], some can't. 'Some are real, and some are not real. Let's try some. Do you want to eat the plastic ones?' 'No'. They could tell that they were sweet or juicy, or they were wet, and some had seeds. Then they could draw a picture of a grape. Did these kids know what grapes are? NOW they know what grapes are. You had to show the parents [that] it was experiential learning."

Along with intentional play and discovery-based learning, implementation of DAP includes, as perceived by study participants, the need to focus on relationship-building, self- and other-awareness, impulse control, and social interaction learning. Participants talked about the integration of social-emotional learning in DAP and how TK is different from both preschool and kindergarten in this area. "There's a big difference between K and TK . . . teaching them how to use their words. It's not preschool but it's not kindergarten. You can't be doing everything for them the way that sometimes preschool does. You have to start building that independence." Another teacher relayed that "the biggest difference for me is social-emotional learning and focusing on oral language development. Those are huge in TK. They're not even addressed in kindergarten. They're not Common Core, so why should we teach them? It's just frustrating for me, to get these kids to a point where they are being assertive, and they are being empathetic and they're practicing compassion and they're practicing all these things that you need to be a civilian. Then they get to kindergarten. It's like 'Sit in your seat. Hold the pencil. Bubble in the bubbles.' The little stuff, to a little kid, is the big stuff. It's like 'Don't sweat the small stuff,' but that is their life. Their life is the small stuff."

Children who have experienced trauma were a focus for several study participants. “Research tells us that young children need to have a relationship with the person that they’re learning from. We know that children in this community are experiencing stress. We need to create environments and have educated people who are aware of it. Then maybe when they get older, they’re not going to need all these extra services.” A teacher shared what could be considered a complicated dance of sorts, between social-emotional learning, behavior challenges, trauma-informed practice and the effects of poverty. “The socioeconomic status is low. We have a lot of struggling kids. It’s stressful, but the thing that makes it more stressful is I don’t know what to do for them. It’s a problem I can’t fix. I can differentiate curriculum, but I sometimes feel like I don’t know how to support them.”

Related to trauma-informed best practices, participants also talked about the child as a self-confident learner. “That’s why 50% [of classroom time] is social-emotional [learning] for TK curriculum. It’s not about driving curriculum; it’s about teaching little humans how to survive in this world.” While not related directly to trauma, one teacher reflected that “I feel like the umbrella of social-emotional has to be here [in TK] because there isn’t time for it to be there (in K). If I can gift this population the social-emotional skills that they’re going to need to be successful, because it’s so academic in kindergarten, then that has to be my goal. The difference is that I get to choose to make this a social-emotional [learning environment] and include academic growth in the same program. [Kindergarten teachers] don’t have that choice.”

For another participant, social-emotional learning must incorporate an understanding of culture as well. “I mean I’ll never forget when I was teaching music, I brought in bread and butter, because one of the songs [was about that]. And the kids were like ‘We don’t know what

bread is' because they were from east Los Angeles. They knew what tortillas were, but they hadn't had bread. And certainly, they would've never put butter on it."

Several participants held parents to account regarding social-emotional learning. "Where now mom and dad [say] 'Here's my phone, play with it. Here's an iPad.' I don't say, 'Your child has a low language because you've never talked to them.' And they have no muscle control, 'cause they have been sitting their whole life, and they've never played on playgrounds" suggested one teacher. Another added, "I've noticed that there's more kids coming in that have higher needs, socially and emotionally; I feel like I can't help them."

Another teacher reminded about the need to arrange classroom space to accommodate differing social-emotional needs and developmental levels of children. "having a rest area, a place that they can take themselves. It's somewhere they can go when they're angry, sad, mad. They're in a safe nook." The importance of social-emotional learning was repeated frequently. "What matters is that they can take care of themselves, that they can be problem-solvers, that they're resourceful and creative. If we can teach children how to take care of themselves, how to respect one another, and feel part of a family, that's really a big thing." Another participant remarked similarly: "Those life skill words keep coming up. Initiative. Resourceful. Responsible. If you send a kid to K with social/emotional skills and curiosity and initiative for their learning, you're gonna have lifelong learners versus kids that need intervention in two years." "I mean, if you don't know how to be with other people, it doesn't matter how smart you are. If they're probably not going to be a reader, how about they be a friend?"

Understanding the value of social-emotional learning, the implementation of DAP and the avoidance of DIP, study participants discussed the influence of site and district administrators on TK programs. These relationships, as described in detail by study participants, were either

very positive or very difficult as there appeared to be little ambiguity about how teachers felt. As site principals are often program decision-makers, it was important to study the effects of administrators having or lacking an understanding of developmentally appropriate practice.

Theme 6: Administrative decisions regarding transitional kindergarten

implementation. Relationships with site and district administrators rose to a top concern when applying versus coding strategies. Using this strategy assisted in identifying which processes and organizations conflict with each other, both conceptually and in grounded attributes. A study participant reflected that “Well one principal when it first started said ‘I don’t believe in TK’. Well you can’t not believe in something, it’s there.” Likewise, a veteran TK teacher did not hold back. “But here’s an even bigger piece of the problem . . . admin that has no Early Ed background understanding or desire to understand. They want you to have a benchmark. They want you to do a summative assessment. I think they need know that play is work. If you look at the standards, there are no standards for play. First grade has the standard for PE minutes. But there is no kindergarten standard for play. Teachers aren’t going to do it if the bosses say it’s not important.”

Interview data revealed that participants disagreed with many administrative decisions regarding TK. One participant shared, “Then comes a principal who says, ‘Let’s mix things up again’. The teacher they put in TK just last year was in fifth grade. They just said, ‘We need a warm body’. They pulled 8th grade and 5th grade teachers, put them in TK..” She continued: “Two years ago they opened up TK to through February birthdays. They didn’t tell us. They did not prepare us. First day of school we’re looking at our list, going ‘How come I have all these birthdays in December and January? This doesn’t make sense.’ Now I’m teaching preschool.

You didn't prepare us for this. My principal, this was her first year . . . do you know what she said to me? Just go home and have a drink. So, I picked up my things and I walked out."

Other participants were more succinct about their relationships with local administrators. One suggested that "This is the issue that many TK teachers have . . . the principal doesn't know what's going on. My principal wanted me to do this kinda stuff and, it's not developmentally appropriate. They wanna put like, sentence strips, and [teach] nouns and verbs."

Several participants described how the administrator made the decision to move them to TK. "He came to me and he was like, you know, they're gonna have this TK thing, and I'm thinking you're the person to do it because they need somebody that has child development, and you're the only person in our entire district that has this child development degree. And we want to put all of the kids from our entire district, they will come to you at our school." Another participant shared, "I'm not saying we're going to lose [you]. I'm saying would you like to teach TK?" It was almost like, 'If you don't say yes to that, we're going to lose [release] you.'" She further suggested that "It's all about numbers. You have to have this number that comes to school every day so you can get this number worth of money, so your school can reach this number worth of scores so that you get this number on the . . . it's numbers. Kids are numbers."

To seemingly look more positively at administrators, one participant recalled that "I emailed him (the school principal) and said, 'This is a model of what TK looks like that is consistent with the Preschool Learning Foundations . . . consistent with the National Association of Early Childhood Education's standards. I am offering this tool to you to send to principals and new TK teachers to see if it would be helpful in providing them with at least a model. But then the district is like, 'Well, there's no money for that,' but there's no money for . . . anything in TK. There's no one in a district administrating and looking at TK." Another teacher, too,

appeared to initially support “teaching” administration about TK. “I would really want them to understand DAP. I think our environment is even more important than in a higher grade. They’re learning by doing everything, learning by experiencing. The first principal that we had here was afraid of my little kiddos. She wouldn’t step foot in my room.” This participant relayed that she believed that “their number one job as a principal, is to avoid lawsuits.”

One teacher, like other participants in the study, did not feel supported as a TK teacher. “So, it was just like ‘here’s the Preschool Learning Foundations. Good luck.’ I still am very disappointed by them (district administrators), because of the way they treat the TK teacher. And they do not recognize the differences between TK and kinder. Unfortunately, they started like this: Here’s TK, it’s part of the legislature and you’re going to do it . . . it’s like people who don’t understand development of children in any way, shape or form, make the decisions for children.”

Strong emotion seemed to come from an experienced teacher. “My fear is that this guy is so corrupt, and he’ll do whatever he can” [whether it is compliant with law or not].” She provided background on this opinion. “So, there was not a room for us at [a local school], so they sent me and any kids who were willing to ride the bus up the road. I was kicked into this portable and I was literally given a few tables and not enough chair, the standard issue of crayons and paper.”

Several participants experienced more positive relationships with site administrators. “I always joke with my district when they have openings. I’m like, “Are you gonna make me move?” They’re like, “no.” No one wants TK. My principal . . . she better not retire. Because if she leaves, I don’t know what I’m gonna do. I know my superintendent really wants the high numbers (average daily attendance), but for the second year in a row I have almost 24 kids and he’s like, ‘That’s too many.’ And from another participant “Luckily, my district was very open

and willing to get us whatever we needed. So, we went through a catalog and we picked . . . a kitchen, blocks, and X, Y, Z. They were willing to do that for us because they knew that TK should look different [from kindergarten]. I do feel really fortunate because our superintendent comes from early childhood. She taught at an elementary level and so she is very invested in getting us the training.” These comments transition well to the next topic of professional learning.

Theme 7: Professional learning experiences and opportunities. Returning to the methodological study design elements, two populations of participants can be identified and stratified: those who participated in trainings provided by the California Department of Education (CDE) and those who did not. Thirteen study participants attended the California Preschool Instructional Network’s (CPIN) TK PL training modules that offer both academic and continuing education units and are acceptable earnings toward the required 24 units in ECE/CD.

Online and in-person training sessions were developed at a cost of \$10,000,000.00 which was provided to the CDE by the legislature and were completed in 2016. Approximately 9,000 trainings sessions have been offered with participation of approximately 4,500 TK teachers, 1,800 preschool teachers, and 500 kindergarten teachers. Study participants, also, participated in in-person 4-year college/university coursework ($n = 6$), workshops/trainings ($n = 2$), in-person community college coursework ($n = 4$), and online community college coursework ($n = 1$).

The in-person training modules included series of trainings within the domains of: (a) Social Emotional Learning, (b) English Language Development, (c) Language and Literacy, (d) Math, (e) Physical Development, (f) Health Overview, (g) Visual and Performing Arts, (h) Science, (i) Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math, and (j) History/Social Science.

Overall, the 13 participants in this population attended 216 in-person training modules. Reflections on participation in these modules was mixed due to complications that will be presented in Chapter 5. Sometimes participants did not know if they had participated in the PL modules, will also be discussed. If placed on a continuum, comments on these trainings ranged from what could be defined as inadequate, adequate, and superb. Looking first at comments from participants who found little value, “some of the things that [the module trainer presented were] very, very preschool, and sometimes [the trainer didn’t seem to] understand the workings of K–12,” suggested one study participant. Another suggested that the trainings were not offered at a convenient time for her when stating, “No, I went to one CPIN thing, but because they were offered after school [I couldn’t attend more sessions].”

Other participants experienced the TK PL modules differently. “You know, I think that the classes have been so helpful so immediately . . . like you take it from there and put it to work. Explaining where that [module content] comes from has been so helpful to people that didn’t have any [ECE background] because they [did not have preparation classes] in school.” While this participant saw value in the modules and attended many sessions, she raised a point that has surfaced in state-level discussions regarding the TK training sessions which were collaboratively developed by the California Preschool Instructional Network (CPIN). “CPIN is wonderful, but it’s the name . . . California *Preschool* (emphasis added) Instructional Network . . . that makes it sound like [the modules] weren’t particularly TK. If it said ‘CPIN’ but it literally had a new name on it [then maybe more would understand the value].”

For those who expressed that CPIN TK Professional Learning modules have been highly regarded, it appears that relationships with the trainers is key factor in the success of the modules. “I love her [the CPIN TK Lead trainer]. That’s why anything she asks, I’m like, okay,

I'll do it because she's helped me so much with my program. I've been with [the CPIN TK Lead trainer] since the beginning and went to every meeting she had. She's phenomenal. So, I really felt like I had *her* as a tool; I feel sorry for anyone else that didn't." Another participant concurred on the importance of the abilities of the trainer when sharing that "[the CPIN TK Lead trainer] does an amazing job. It's the best that I've gotten because I feel like an island because [school and district administrators] think what I say isn't important."

Another primary success of the CPIN TK PL sessions, for some participants, has been the direct connection to the preschool foundations. Though the word *preschool* suggests to some that the resources are not for TK and the word *foundations* may be misunderstood rather than seen as the same as "standards," participants in this group were grateful for the deep exposure to, and new understanding of, the California Preschool Learning Foundations (CPLFs). As two participants suggested, "What helped was the preschool foundations" and "(the CPLFs) helped me visualize it from a different perspective." "Through my trainings," suggested a third participant, "I've really gotten more into the preschool foundations which [when] teaching kindergarten I didn't really know much about."

Later in the interview, the same participant opined about the CPLFs. "I see that as an avenue of politicizing myself more to speaking up for teachers and speaking up especially for children. I think that it's really important that we be more explicit with the law. I hear this over and over again. 'There are no standards for TK.' I go, 'that is wrong.' And when anyone asks me, I say this is the law. If someone says you're supposed to be doing [a published curriculum], that is not what the law says. The law says you're practicing the preschool learning foundations."

Theme 8: Teachers' policy concerns. Study participants vocalized judgements about the design, details, and roll-out of TK legislation. It appears most (22 of 23 or 96%) are not against

(or “versus”) TK, but rather against and disappointed (even distressed) about how it originated and how it was launched. Like the primary topics of teacher preparation and implementation of DAP, strong feelings about Policy were shared. From inconsistent implementation, to teaching TK without understanding the developmental needs of children, to resentment toward how TK was rolled out and how it is perceived by school administrators, to critical suggestions for policy- and decision-makers, study participants shared valuable insights.

While study participants understood that “grandfathering” meant that teachers assigned to TK did not have to have 24 units of ECE/CD (until 2020), some were not aware of why grandfathering became an acceptable practice. The California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CCTC) has employed the practice of grandfathering previously. As one example, to earn a cross-cultural, language and academic development (CLAD) credential or certificate or a bilingual cross-cultural language and academic development (BCLAD) credential or certificate, the CCTC allowed a five- to nine-year grandfathering period (depending on the type of certificate or credential) for established teachers. “On the assumption that teachers of [Limited English Proficiency (LEP)] *students need specialized skill and knowledge*” (emphasis added) (Carton and Walton, 1994) to teach California’s linguistically diverse student population, established teachers were not *pre*-pared, but rather post-prepared to teach thousands of children through LEP programs. Likewise, the CCTC distributed “Coded Correspondence” Number 10–19 (2010) with the subject “Document Grandfathering Clause” which asserts that “The new Education Code section simply allows [individuals] to continue serving in California’s public schools on the basis of a document issued under previous regulations without having to meet new requirements as long as the holder satisfies renewal requirements.”

One participant lamented “They were grandfathered in, and a principal looked at their transcripts and says, okay yeah, an agriculture class, we’ll count that as ECE.” Another participant agreed. “A K5 teacher who does not have ECE is not going to be effective.” Similarly, another expressed her opinion about a grandfathered teacher. “She didn’t do anything different. She didn’t have any training . . . there’s no other profession, you can’t name one that molds these kids the way we have or are tasked to mold them. And we allow this . . . there is no other profession that allows this. Yet, these crummy teachers who call out their contracts can tear down the psyche of a child.” Continuing emotive comments, a participant shared that teachers have not only been wrongly given credit for the required academic units, but that the district has also moved ineffective teachers to TK. “It would be easier for that teacher, because she wasn’t effective in sixth grade, or third so now we’re going to put her in TK . . . I’m telling you, that’s the story of my school right now.”

One participant shared a different perspective. “At the same time, you’re talking to someone who has a K–8 credential, and you’re now forcing them to do 24 units. They’re just leaving. They’re like ‘I’m too close to retirement’ [to want to earn units], 2020 [the legislative deadline to earn ECE/CD units] is getting closer.” Sharing yet another perspective, another participant relayed that “one of our TK teachers was not grandfathered in so she had to take child development classes and she said they were hard; not in the educational sense, but hard because she is an established teacher with kids that are just out of high school. It made me feel a little better hearing her say that they almost weren’t relevant to her. I’m glad I didn’t not waste time.”

Another participant thought about the topic academically. “I think that it is good that they are requiring more ECE units for people to teach TK. I do personally know of some people who do not have those units who are teaching TK. Unfortunately, some schools just place teachers in

that position maybe when that's an easy job. I've had people who will say, gosh it's just TK. What difference does it make? We're talking about the whole start of a person's whole experience with education and how they feel about school and how they feel about learning and all of that. So as far as what would be most helpful, a couple of hours of child development is not enough."

Another suggested that "The knowledge that TK was so poorly legislated and administrated with no money allocated for districts to set up developmentally appropriate programs. No adult to child ratio legislated. No developmentally appropriate classrooms or playgrounds required. Had I known what a lacking program TK was, I may not have accepted the job." An additional participant's reflection was also tinged with unhappiness. "She taught TK three years. When I'd see her, she was overwhelmed. This year she gave [TK] up and gave it to another teacher. She went on about how she hated (TK), and it was the worst years of her life. She had 28 to 29 children, no help, no aid, no nothing."

Study participants were eager to share what they believe should happen next. Participants suggested that preparation programs should do more to prepare teachers with "more early ed classes and specialized credentials" and "There should be more developmental classes, that this is what children [at these] ages and stages do" and "that IHEs and the CCTC should consider Kinder teachers having ECE background as well because a lot of districts do move [teachers]." "You can't just take somebody the day before school is going to start who is thinking they were going to be teaching 3rd grade and now you're teaching TK." Preparation programs and credentialing requirements, as suggested by the participants, could lead to better child outcomes. "Kindergarten teachers [should] take a social emotional course. Require them to take an ECE course in social emotional development." One participant went further when opining "It's like a

doctor. He doesn't stop learning. He must prove that [that he remains worthy of licensure] and had to meet [professional competencies]. He must provide to the agency that regulates MDs, that he's continuing and that he's up to date."

Class size concerns, combination class-configurations challenges, and formal assessments, were also raised by participants. "Number 1, I think they shouldn't have had combination classes. I hear horror stories of TK/K and I think developmentally that it's not appropriate"; "I would like us to be treated more like preschool than K. I would rather be the last year of preschool than the first year of K in some ways. More people around, smaller ratios, different expectations"; and "TK children should be blowing bubbles, not filling them in." Participants agreed as well that these challenges for teachers may cause undue stress and weakened outcomes for children.

School district TK programs require a new way of thinking about instructional practice, individualized learning and teacher expertise. "It's not preschool. And it's not kinder and it's really just not the step in between. It really has to be individualized. There should be something in our profession . . . instead of 'you get to be this forever', that you have to re-certify yourself and you have to go see [observe] [a highly effective TK teacher]." Likewise, a participant stated "Whoever legislated TK . . . they didn't know what the heck they were talking about. What we really need is Universal Preschool for all 4-year olds! My district did not spend money on the TK program!" Similar participant sentiments echoed the notion that participants felt more preparation should have been done before legislating TK.

Acknowledging that TK legislation cannot be redone, participants suggested a formal examination of program outcomes. "There should be a legislated, mandatory, timely review of programs. They should then be evaluated and improved;" and "I wish that I had the confidence

to be a voice for the little people, because what I see happening even today, even though we know what we know about Early Ed and how children develop and grow, we still have teachers trying to teach TK students like they're kinder or first." While TK is currently a topic of focus in many education circles, it is the voices of the teachers themselves that may be left out of these conversations. They interact with not only TK children, but with their families and/or guardians. "Parents are not necessarily seeing the benefits of it. They're like, 'I don't have to pay preschool costs.' I feel for them (parents) just feeling overwhelmed and they can't just do what I tell them to do because that's not a sound decision. I wish there was something more out there to help parents or educate parents when it comes to [choosing preschool or TK]." Similarly, one participant noted that, "They've done the research, we know that kids need an extra year to mature, to grow, to get what they need, to really develop the love of going to school. And we don't want them to struggle in school when they first start." Participants indicated that their responsibilities for successful program implementation went beyond teaching children and providing an appropriate learning environment.

The reflections, suggestions and recommendations provided by study participants may elevate concerns for stakeholders in California's public education system and the concerns may be complicated by how the millions of dollars provided to initiate and support the TK program roll-out were allocated which will be more fully discussed in Chapter 5.

Theme 9: Teacher anecdotes. "Discerning the conflicting power issues among constituents and stakeholders is an important diagnostic for initiating and facilitating positive social change . . . [look] for patterns of social domination, hierarchy, and privilege . . . examine the power that holds patterns in place [and] how people accept or struggle against them [to] reveal injustice" (Saldaña, 2009, p. 99). Despite the conflicts discussed with TK teachers during

study interviews, warm and loving, authentic and heartfelt emotion were presented in pet names assigned to classrooms of children. “Little JuJu Beans,” “my kiddos,” “our early/late friends,” “these little guys,” “bunnies,” and “the littles” suggest that although conflict may exist between adults in the TK phenomenon, the primary focus for these teachers is their impact on the youngest in American society. Several times, study participants were brought to tears when discussing perceived inadequacies and injustices for and toward children.

An inadequate understanding of the need for, the appearance of, and failure to investigate the purpose of play was expressed by a particularly frustrated participant:

I’ll never forget, I got a call from the secretary my first year in TK. There were some district office personnel here, and they said [there is graffiti outside your classroom]’ and so I’m walking outside, of course there’s sidewalk chalk, but that doesn’t cross my mind. So, then I go over and I said, ‘Cathy, I’ve got sidewalk chalk and whatever, so then she calls the district office to find out. What did this graffiti look like?’ It was on the sidewalk, and it was different colors, and it looked like chalk’. Oh my gosh, I went through the roof! I got online, and I found all the research that I could on-muscle development, crossing the midline, and how we’re watching students. If they’re making their circle and going straight up, then they don’t have that figured out yet. But if they’re doing this, okay, then they’re ready. I went through the whole thing, and I printed everything out, and I said, send this. (Unnamed study participant)

One TK teacher, during the evolving implementation of the local TK program, considered a variety of interactions with administrators at both the school and district levels. “I’m trying really hard to not separate administration from who we are as a district, but there is a level of care that doesn’t exist. It’s gone from a [district] administrator who began with the TK

program and was an early childhood educator, super passionate about the program, [but] very angry by year three. She chose to go back and be a principal rather than work without the families and children.” An experienced teacher indicated that she often tried to assist new teachers and worked closely with them to create developmentally appropriate learning environments. “One principal threw out all the blocks because he was so mad that the teacher was choosing to have those be available. But, the very young teacher didn’t know. She was like, ‘Oh, that must very important then and therefore I will have an academic TK program.’ She was trying really hard because I was pushing her to allow the choice time to literally be choice time. You can play here, when you’re finished put the things away, make a new choice. She was trying really hard and the principal walked in with a bunch of grown-ups and the kids were seeing how far the [toy] car could fly across the room. They rolled it on the table. She said the principal came back in later and said, You have a dangerous and chaotic room and this needs to stop now. And she came to me and she goes, ‘Uh, thanks a lot!’ No, no, she’s wrong. I’m right. That is not dangerous and chaotic; that’s super cool. How far did the car go, by the way, before it hit the grown up? Because you can measure that!”

Chapter 4 Summary

Firsthand insights from 23 transitional kindergarten teachers has included a broad range of correlating topics of interest. Organizing participant responses into nine themes has provided data that assists in responding to the two research questions of focus:

1. How do California local education agency educators assigned to teach in transitional kindergarten classrooms describe the content, quality, and quantity of early childhood education and child development coursework in pre-service K–8 degree preparation programs and credential acquirement?

2. How do California local education agency educators assigned to teach in transitional kindergarten classrooms describe their experiences implementing research-based early childhood education developmentally appropriate practices in a TK classroom?

Developmentally appropriate practice, according to study participants, acknowledges a wide research base about learning through play. Describing areas of the classroom where children may have free choice to stack, build, create, use a variety of writing and drawing tools, play “make believe” or pretend to be a chef, doctor, teacher, or pilot were essential to most, but not all participants. Intentional play opportunities where content can be freely explored, areas for being alone, with a small group, or in a large group contributed to what participants believed to be developmentally appropriate. Unstructured time (“exploratory time” as one participant described it) is developmentally appropriate as noted by Fred Rogers. “Play is often talked about as if it were a relief from serious learning. But, for children, play is serious learning. Play is really the work of childhood and gives children a chance to practice what they are learning” (Rogers, n.d.). In fact, two participants refer to “play” as “work” when describing the schedule for the day. Children are working and refer to themselves as “workers.”

Similarly, social-emotional learning was a primary focus for participants when discussing the implementation of DAP. As one participant suggested, “I mean, if you don’t know how to be with other kids, other people, it doesn’t matter how smart you are.” Encouraging children to explore their emotions, give words to emotions to assist in expression of how one is feeling, validation of emotions and acknowledging a human right to be accepted and respected for the unique emotions each of us brings to our social interactions, provides children, according to participants, with avenues toward self-respect and respect for others. Building positive relationships, experiencing the complexities of various roles human beings must be able to apply,

understanding social structures, having concern and compassion for others . . . these topics all rose to the top in conversations with participants. As one study participant indicated, social-emotional awareness and learning is “the umbrella” for all other learning.

Study participants provided insights regarding how the physical environments of indoor learning spaces (classrooms) and outdoor spaces (playgrounds), adult:child ratios, assessments, standards and foundations, and curriculum impact their ability to provide a developmentally appropriate program for children. Strong feelings about experiences with a large number of children assigned to one adult, district-required assessments, and curriculum choices or mandates were revealed with most participants indicating that these areas are challenges and frustrations rather than supports for providing a DAP-rich environment.

Policy has had impact on study participants’ perceptions of the effectiveness of TK in California as well as on their ability to provide developmentally appropriate learning environments, which addresses the second research question regarding DAP implementation. A minority of participants indicated that they felt they had site and district administrators who understand, or were willing to try to understand, the intricacies of effective early childhood education. The majority, however, suggested that site administrators (also referred to as “instructional leaders”) did not show the capacity to or desire to understand this level of education. While some administrators, according to participants, simply allow TK teachers to do what they think best, many administrators appeared to present barriers to DAP by not providing the necessary learning environment, curricular, or collaboration tools for TK teachers to autonomously successful. Using words and phrases such as “fight,” “graffiti,” “no money,” “numbers,” “no guidance,” “disrespect,” and “nothing different (from kindergarten)” most participants indicated that they want and need for site and district level administrators to become

more knowledgeable about early childhood education research and practices in order for them to effectively provide appropriate learning environments which ensure that children fully meet their individual capacity to become socially-emotionally and cognitively thriving learners during the TK year as a foundation to future skill-building.

Through nine primary themes and 48 sub-themes, 23 study participants provided rich information and reflection regarding teacher preparation, program implementation, and policy making. As one participant noted, “I could talk to you forever” because, as another participant suggested, “no one listens.” “I appreciate you following up with some research on it” shared a third participant “because that’s going to be the power. No one listens to us unless we have hard science to back it up.” Chapter 5 will provide readers with additional insights regarding teacher preparation practicums, the early education workforce, the complexities of education in California, DAP and DIP in K–12 school districts, and predictions for future research agendas.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

Introduction to Chapter 5

The purpose of Chapter 5 is to provide readers with not only a recapitulation of themes presented in previous chapters, but also to further develop the themes so as to stimulate actionable interest in readers about the subjects of teacher preparation, implementation of developmentally appropriate practice in transitional kindergarten classrooms, the potentiality and actuality of unintended consequences of legislative action, outcomes of local administrative decision-making, and the need for the worlds of early childhood education and K–12 education to work together using shared knowledge of best practices and research-based decision-making. Connecting findings to previous and current scholarly literature, revisiting participant reflections, and interpreting a wide set of data will, it is desired, stimulate future research agendas.

Additionally, recommendations, predictions, and cautionary signs about the future of early childhood education in systems of K–12 public education will be discussed.

From a deep exploration of research interviews conducted with 23 transitional kindergarten teachers, both expected and unexpected conclusionary themes emerged. Intending to understand both the constructive and contrary impacts of teacher preparation on classroom practice in transitional kindergarten classrooms, the following implications for CA education institutions need to be implemented:

- An urgent review of the impact of the perceived lack of thorough pre-legislative scrutiny regarding transitional kindergarten and the preparation of TK teachers and determination about how to now mitigate negative outcomes;
- An urgent need for researchers to conduct deep studies on the implementation practices and outcomes of children in California’s transitional kindergarten;
- An urgent need for California site-based administrators to enhance their knowledge of early childhood education; and
- An urgent need to ensure that those who are teaching or will be teaching children in transitional kindergarten programs have the research-based skills, knowledge, and disposition necessary.

Discussion, in the remaining pages of this work, is organized in such a way as to include these four conclusionary themes as well as sub-themes that arose during the data analysis process. Organized by a focus on results (summary, discussion, and relationship to scholarly literature), study limitations, implications of the results, and recommendations, it is my intent to inspire readers of Chapter 5 to consider the data obtained in this study as a springboard by which

to identify meaningful approaches to enhance California's educational system from early childhood through teacher preparation programs.

Summary of the Results

With evidence provided in Chapter 2, the reader is now reminded that while there are limited empirical findings regarding TK (Arbizzi, 2016; Facaros, 2016; Fenney, 2016; Soria, 2016), educators may not have the knowledge and skills (Darling-Hammond & Baratz-Snowden, 2007; Wayman, Foster, Mantle-Bromley, & Wilson, 2003) to effectively implement developmentally appropriate practice due to a lack of early childhood education coursework in elementary education bachelor degree teacher preparation programs (Fong, 2016; Maniates, 2016; Silva, 2016). The purpose of this study was first identified in Chapter 1 by proposing that examining and understanding the experiences of TK teachers coming from a K–8 background, preparation, and credentialing system to an early childhood education teaching assignment, will contribute not only to an identifiable research gap (Henderson, 2016; Núñez-Pineda, 2016; Silva, 2016; Soria, 2016), but will also inform California and nationwide stakeholders about foreseeable challenges resulting from inconsistent implementation of developmentally appropriate practice provided to current California TK cohorts.

With this problem and purpose in mind, two research questions were developed to provide the basis for interview questioning and probing protocol:

1. How do California local education agency educators assigned to teach in transitional kindergarten classrooms describe the content, quality, and quantity of early childhood education and child development coursework in pre-service K–8 degree preparation programs and credential acquirement?
2. How do California local education agency educators assigned to teach in transitional

kindergarten classrooms describe their experiences implementing research-based early childhood education developmentally appropriate practices in a TK classroom?

Through thoughtful analysis of interview data, nine primary themes emerged and were discussed in the previous chapter:

1. Teacher Preparation Experiences (undergraduate degrees, credentialing, child development coursework, practicums and feelings of preparedness);
2. Current Teacher Challenges and Successes (curriculum, adult:child ratios, and assessments);
3. Learning through Play;
4. Classroom Environment (outdoor spaces, facilities, bathrooms, free choice centers);
5. Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) and Developmentally Inappropriate Practices (DIP) (behavior management, social-emotional learning, target v. continuum philosophies, standards and foundations, special education and/or retention or intervention);
6. Administrative Decisions Regarding Transitional Kindergarten Implementation;
7. Professional Learning Experiences and Opportunities (training that mattered, California Transitional Kindergarten Stipend program, Transitional Kindergarten Professional Learning, California Preschool Instructional Network TK workshops;
8. Teachers' Policy Concerns (Grandfathering/Grandmothering, 24-unit requirement, perceptions about TK, marketing TK); and
9. Teacher anecdotes (teacher colleagues, report cards, names for TK students, and collaboration).

Regarding Theme 1, *Preparation*, study participants suggested that the teacher preparation programs they completed inadequately prepared them to teach. Twenty out of 23 participants did not feel that the practicum experiences were beneficial. Practicums were perceived to be inadequate because of the duration of the placement (too short), the inadequacy of engagement opportunities (observing rather than practice the teaching craft), the perceived instructional quality of the classroom teacher, the lack of protocol clarity when conducting classroom observations, dated instructional materials, and instructors who had not themselves been teachers in early education or elementary settings. These findings are consistent with previous research such as Silva's (2016) study findings which suggested "teachers' feelings of preparedness are important indicators of whether or not they are prepared to meet the challenges that go hand in hand with the profession" and coincide with findings developed by the American Institute of Research (2016) and earlier by Liu (2007).

Similarly Themes 2 and 6, *Current Teacher Challenges and Successes*, and *Administrative Decisions Regarding Transitional Kindergarten Implementation* (respectively) provided data-based discussion of curriculum, adult:child ratios, and assessments. I found that 65% of study participants shared frustration with decisions that impacted instructional practice with the opportunity to provide input before decisions were made. This may be part of a larger systems problem as expressed by Nicholson, Lin, Maniates, Woolley, Grant-Groves, and Engdahl (2018) as well as findings related to how site administrators make decisions (Kohler, Christensen, & Kilgo, 2012; Leary, 1997; Ost & Schiman, 2015).

Themes 3, 4, and 5 are separated by differing sub-themes; however, all three directly connect to what transitional kindergarten children experiencing daily. Theme 3, *Learning through Play*, Theme 4 *Classroom Environment* (with the sub-themes of outdoor classroom,

facilities, bathrooms, free choice centers) and Theme 5 *Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) and Developmentally Inappropriate Practices (DIP)* (with the sub-themes of behavior management, social-emotional learning, target v. continuum philosophies, standards and foundations, special education and/or retention or intervention), emerged from teachers' understanding of appropriate (and inappropriate) program implementation. I found that 100% of study participants believed that providing opportunities for play was essential for an effective and developmentally appropriate TK classroom learning environment; however, it was revealed that five of the 23 (22%) teachers embrace "intentional play" as learning opportunities while others appeared to have less appreciation for the value of intentional exploratory (also known as "free choice") play as evidenced in daily practice. Additionally, I found that while participants focused heavily on classroom set-up and offering a learning space to children that is engaging, based on assessment data to intentionally plan play (learning potentialities), and providing children with opportunities for individual, small group, and whole group activities, the participants also felt that district-inflicted barriers often prevented the opportunity to fully provide engaging learning environments. These findings correlate to previous studies about instructional strategies implemented and in deliberate and intentional physical configurations of the learning environment (Broadbent, White, Mareschal, & Kirkham, 2018; Jechura, Wooldridge, Bertelsen, & Mayers, 2016).

Discussion within the parameters of Theme 7, *Professional Learning Experiences and Opportunities* provided insights into the population of teachers (12 of 23 or 52%) who participated in the Transitional Kindergarten Professional Learning Modules funded by the California legislature and those who did not. Teachers who needed to attain additional child development and/or early childhood education units to reach the 24-unit legislative requirement

to teach TK, talked about how they complied with legal requirements. Approximately half of the participants indicated that they participated in professional development (PD), TK, K, and early childhood education conferences, staff development, and institute of higher education (IHE) coursework. Other participants were “grandfathered” into TK with no additional requirements. I found that participation in the TK professional learning modules had a direct, positive impact on program implementation and classroom practice for many, but not all of 12 who participated. Participants relayed that their own classroom practices changed to align more fully with high-quality early childhood education research-based methods rather than instructional methodology in typical K–8 settings. To my knowledge, there is no previous research to which to connect this finding.

Likewise, findings identified for Themes 8 and 9, *Teachers’ Policy Concerns* and *Teacher Anecdotes* do not have connectivity to any scholarly research conducted thus far; however, this does not invalidate my findings on these themes. Participants shared concerns about the outcomes of TK legislation and policy decision-making on program implementation which will be discussed more thoroughly in the next section.

Discussion of the Results

Discussing the findings of Theme 1, *Preparation*, includes the primary finding that 20 of 23 study participants considered the teacher preparation programs that they completed to be ineffectual. “Lack of attention to student learning in current teacher preparation exacerbates the long-perceived (and long-critiqued) disconnect between university-based teacher preparation and [elementary] schools” suggested Cochran-Smith and Villegas (2015, p. 391). Hollins (2011) discussed this concern in an article titled “Teacher Preparation for Quality Teaching” and found that “Conventional preservice preparation programs have been criticized for being too often

characterized by fragmentation, weak pedagogy, and a lack of articulation among courses and between courses and field experiences” (p. 1). Similar conclusions were noted in the research work of Erickson, Wentworth and Black (2010) when suggesting that “there was little consistent evidence that the teacher preparation programs were actually advancing the knowledge, skills, and dispositions [of teachers]” (p. 56). Correlating, but adjacent to these findings, Morris and Hiebert (2017) found that “research to date has documented more consistently the positive effects of clinical experiences than content knowledge on graduates” (p. 3).

Initially emphasizing the differences between *teacher* quality and *teaching* quality, Darling-Hammond (2017) further added to the discussion of teacher preparation by focusing on what needs to be done differently in preparation programs: “Extend the duration and rethink the design of clinical experiences to make the more tightly connected to coursework and more expertly supervised” (p. 69). More exposure to and experience in actual classrooms would provide deeper levels of understanding and skill before being assigned to independently providing instruction of children.

Darling-Hammond, who has been rated as the most influential university-based education scholar in the United States (Women in Academia Report, 2016) and who has become a recent member of the California Department of Education State Board, converts research into and policy and practice. In 2002, Darling-Hammond and Hammerness, published “Meeting Old Challenges and New Demands: The Redesign of the Stanford Teacher Education Program” in the education journal *Issues in Education*. Follow-up work included “Assessing Teacher Education” (2006) which included the development of a ‘clinical curriculum’ [with] clearer expectations for what candidates would learn through carefully calibrated graduated responsibility and supervision on a detailed rubric articulating professional standards” (p. 120)

and “a year-long clinical experience running in parallel with course work in the 1-year credential and master’s degree program” (p. 121). Future academic discussion, it is opined, must include Darling-Hammond’s extensive work in the area of teacher preparation and teacher learning.

Discussion concentrated on Theme 2, *Current Teacher Challenges and Successes*, must include frustrations shared by teachers in the implementation of TK.. As noted previously, such challenges may be part of a larger systems problem as expressed by Nicholson, Lin, Maniates, Woolley, Grant-Groves, and Engdahl (2018). Teacher frustration is an important consideration in discussion of the current findings as this emotion can impact teacher practice, dedication to the profession, and professional satisfaction (or lack thereof). “Great schools recognise (sic) that teachers attain excellence within a context in which they are supported, encouraged, and inspired” (Stannard, 2014, p. 27). Tarver (2018) found that “A negative experience with administrative support left teachers feeling helpless and unappreciated” (p. 79) which is precisely what one third of participants in the current study indicated. Future research efforts can add to this discussion by giving a teachers an authentic voice, in increased numbers, about real and preceived frustrations that may have negative impact on instruction.

Discussion of Learning through Play, the third study theme, is essential and a precursor discussion to how learning environments are designed and a precursor discussion to developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) implementation. Vogt, Hauser, Stebler, Rechsteiner, and Urech (2018) suggested that “Play and playfulness are at the core of early childhood education, although educators are not always aware of their role in fostering play” (p. 592). Data for interviews with current study participants indicated this to be true. Smedley and Hoskins (2018) concured when asserting that “children’s development, learning and wellbeing are best

served through play and creativity that is ‘child-initiated and child-directed’” (p. 2). Like Theme 2, this content of theme is at the core of effective DAP implementation.

Findings related to classroom environment must be inclusive of indoor learning spaces (“classrooms”), outdoor learning space, physical facilities, bathrooms, and overall spaces within and outside of the primary learning space. California regulations (Title 22) govern facilities licensed by the California Community Care Licensing (CCL) Division of the California Department of Social Services (CSS). “There shall be a ratio of one teacher visually observing and supervising no more than 12 children in attendance” (Title 22, Division 12, Chapter 1); however, this applies only to licensed child care facilities who serve children, including children of approximately four years of age. Title 22 does not apply to programs for children of approximately four years of age in local education agency (LEA) settings (TK). Additionally, Title 22 indicates that “A napping space and a cot or mat must be available for each child under age 5” (Title 22, Division 12, Chapter 1); however, this again, does not apply to LEAs. “There shall be at least 75 square feet per child of outdoor activity space. The outdoor space shall provide a shaded rest area and permit children to reach the activity space safely” (Title 22, Division 12, Chapter 1); is also an elemental requirement of Title 22. Furthermore, “There must be one toilet and hand-washing sink for every 15 children, tables and chairs scaled to the size of children must be provided, all play equipment and materials used by children must be age-appropriate, and drinking water must be readily available both indoors and outdoors” (2007, p. 10) (Title 22, Division 12, Chapter 1). Study participant interviews and classroom observations (when available) indicated that if TK classrooms were to be inspected by DSS/CCL, violations would be identified in many TK classrooms across the state. Adding to this discussion, Fong (2016) found that “Most did not have restrooms in the classroom and many were not even in

close proximity to restrooms, making it hard to take students when teachers were alone with 24 students” (p. 92) which was validated by the data collected for this study.

Discussion centered on Theme 5 related to *Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP)* and *Developmentally Inappropriate Practices (DIP)*, has been woven assiduously throughout this study. Findings indicated that DIP is as prevalent as DAP in California TK classrooms. “DAP provides opportunities for children to work with peers and explore, is based on a child-centered cognitive developmental perspective, and the notion that children learn by actively constructing their own knowledge through interaction with peers, adults, and materials” (Tours, 2017, p. 15). What DAP and DIP are, which DAP elements are critical to child outcomes and which DIP elements are most adverse, and how DAP is supported in the learning community have been revealed by study participants and by research. Thoughtfully, Baron (2014) participated in the DAP discussion when averring that “study findings further align with research that high levels of DAP beliefs do not necessarily translate into practice” (p. 146). Of course, this is highly problematic and was validated by various current doctoral dissertation researchers.

Connected to the discussion focused on Theme 2, *Teachers Challenges and Successes*, findings related to Theme 6, *Administrative Decisions Regarding Transitional Kindergarten Implementation*, have been discussed in current research. Soria’s (2016) contributed to the research gap related to TK and specially to a gap of research regarding administrators’ when sharing the interview comments of participants including: “The information provided about the policy was just “putting it out there” and that it was not really guiding principles on how to “start training teachers or prepare classrooms” (p. 53). Contrary to the findings of this study, Soria (2016) also found (highlighted in italics) that “Concerning the academic versus developmental debate, some principals took an academic stance while others took a more developmental one.

Academic-oriented principals, *while less prevalent but still notable*, emphasized performance and standards” (p. 80) thus the need for additional research related to educators in all capacities (classroom teachers and site administrators) to verify, validate, and augment current (although limited) findings.

Related to Theme 7, *Professional Learning Experiences and Opportunities*, discussion centers on specific professional learning opportunities for TK teachers, related specially to TK program implementation, instructional practices, and collaboration. Correlating this theme to Theme 1, *Teacher Preparation*, provides the opportunity discuss the continuum of learning that is the foundational premise of quality teaching. Learning does not end. Skills can be advanced. New research findings can evolve classroom practice considerations. Not discussed elsewhere, readers may be curious to know about the academic backgrounds of the 23 teacher participants in this study. The number of TK teachers who attained an undergraduate degree in something other than education was much higher than anticipated. Four-year degrees in Anthropology, Archeology, Communications, Psychology, Spanish Literature, Sociology, and Law were captured by Magnitude Coding which “consists of a sub-code to indicate its frequency” (Saldaña, 2013, p. 72). While teachers (regardless of academic background, preparation programs participation, and on-the-job experience) could participate in and benefit from professional learning (PL) as found by Wasik and Hindman (2018), (reminder: PL is focused on established teachers versus professional development or PD which is focused on novice teachers who are still developing skills) it is those teachers who have completed lesser amounts of child development and early childhood education coursework, those teachers who have been “grandfathered (mothered)” into TK, and those teachers who have been indoctrinated in a target versus continuum model of expected child outcomes who could benefit most. Saying this, of

course, really means that it is not the teacher who ultimately benefits, but the children they are charged with educating.

As background to the theme of professional learning opportunities, \$15,000,000.00 was allocated by the legislature to the California Department of Education which then distributed the monies in the form of grants to the 58 local planning councils (LPCs). The LPCs, then, were to disseminate, as a priority, monies directly to TK teachers in order to provide financial support to attain the required 24 units in early childhood education and/or child development. Additionally, \$10,000,000.00 was provided to create TK professional learning (PL) modules.

Discussion of Theme 8, *Teachers' Policy Concerns*, reflects multiple challenges that some teachers, administrators, and local education agencies (LEAs) had with the roll-out of TK. These concerns have, also, been presented in other scholarly works. Considerations regarding the practice of “grandfathering/mothering,” the length of time offered for teachers to acquire 24 units in child development and/or early childhood education, negative perceptions about the purpose of TK, TK “marketing” failures which have sometimes resulted in parent/guardian misunderstandings about the program which was perceived by some parents as retention rather than a program designed for four years on LEA campuses. Notable, “Policy makers anticipated that transitional kindergarten would ‘allow for two years of kindergarten without the stigma of being held back’” (Senate Bill 1381 Analysis, 2010, p. 6 as cited by Soria, 2016, p. 33). Soria (2016) added to the discussion of policy concerns when suggesting that “policy makers do not always consider the reality of what it takes to implement a policy on the ground floor or how the policy will actually impact the school when it is being implemented” (p. 76). This concern must be understood by the legislature when considering future educational policy design.

Lastly, Theme 9, *Teacher Anecdotes*, requires attention when researching and discussing TK program implementation. With frustrations and confusion running high in many elementary school districts, participants in this study were authentic and maybe even shocking when describing experiences with colleagues. Describing attempts at professional collaboration between TK and K teachers, one participant shared that “It was almost fisticuffs if someone had said, ‘Yeah, I’ll take you out back’ someone else would have said, ‘Yeah, I’ll go with you.’” Another opined that “She [my colleague] is a hundred percent violating the children.” These comments reflect Saldaña’s insights (2016) which suggested: “Since emotions are a universal human experience, our acknowledgement of them in our research provides deep insight into the participants’ perspectives, worldviews, and life conditions. Virtually everything we do has an accompanying emotion” (p. 92). Dedication to and passion about serving children draws many emotions to the surface as found in this study.

Discussion of current findings, and the findings of my colleagues, must be the springboard for action. Whether it be new legislation to clarify misunderstandings regarding program intent, new legislation to once again attempt to improve the system, and/or legislation to address the many breakdowns in program implementation for the sake of children. Children without access to bathrooms, drinking water, furniture that fits little bodies, curricula that is research-based for children of this age and developmental stage, and appropriate indoor and outdoor learning spaces may be considered minor when considering that teacher practices have the most significant impact. Many studies on this topic have been published and vetted for accuracy. Included in this discussion, are the 2017 findings of Adnot, Dee, Katz, and Wyckoff who concluded that “Having an effective teacher can dramatically alter students’ educational and economic outcomes” (p. 1) and interestingly, “our results indicate that, under a robust system of

performance assessment, the turnover [or egress of teachers identified as less than “highly effective”] can generate meaningful gains in student outcomes” (p. 20). California has a complicated and unique educational system which must respond to the complicated and unique needs of California children. Future discussions and resulting actions must consider the themes discussed here and in evolving research.

Discussion of the Results in Relation to the Literature

Interpretation of the results summarized in the previous section will provide the reader with insights by which to judge the worthiness of additional research on the themed topics. In contrast to the Summary of the Results, discussion in this section will focus on published research results, as well as correlations and linkages to the current study.

Related to *Teacher Preparation Experiences* (Theme 1), Silva (2016) concluded that “teachers overall do not feel prepared to teach transitional kindergarten” (p. 134) and “determined that the participants did “not feel prepared to teach their students” (p. 135). Said differently, Soria (2016) found that “TK became an amalgamation of two educational systems and has spurred debate over how teachers should be prepared in order to implement high quality, developmentally appropriate transitional kindergarten programs . . . having well prepared teachers for transitional kindergarten is not always the case” (p. 83). The current study findings validate these previous conclusions.

Challenges and Successes of transitional kindergarten teachers as discussed throughout this study and highlighted as Theme 2, were topics in previous research work as well. Two of the theme sub-topics of curriculum and assessments were studied by other researchers and showed significant parallels. For example, Herota (2014) combined findings related to both curriculum and assessments: “As school districts continue to refine curriculum and instructional approaches

for transitional kindergarten, appropriate assessment tools and use of assessment data to differentiate instruction will be important areas of focus” (p. 138). Silva (2016) found that “participants indicated that they did not feel prepared to assess their students. The analysis indicated that participants had trouble assessing their students as it was executed on an individual basis” (p. 129). Baron (2014) added to this academic discussion of assessment in TK by suggesting that “it is important to understand and accept that the needs of elementary schools differ from preschool programs. With that understanding, elementary schools are required to measure academic growth and demonstrate gains to their school boards and school community” (p. 155). Likewise, I found that TK teachers had conflicting internal feelings about curriculum and assessment. Echoing an oft held concern about “teaching to the test,” participants shared concerns and frustrations with the types of assessments required by district administration.. Conversely, participants recognized the value in assessing and identifying the development level and progress of TK children and some noted that the Desired Results Development Profile (DRDP) assessment tools as being helpful, meaningful, and connected to positive early learning outcomes.

The third sub-topic of *Adult:Child Ratios* has connectivity to other current TK research. Research findings of Silva (2016) included the notion that “one of the most re-occurring obstacles that respondents noted was the need for support and additional aide in the classroom” (p. 136). This notion was supported by Fong (2016) who found that “all of the teachers interviewed shared that they wished they had more help with their TK students” (p. 79). Participants in this study were verbose on the topic of ratios; however, one respondent summarized the collective frustration when stating “adult:child ratios impact not only DAP

implementation, behavior management, and the teacher's ability to provide exploratory areas in the classroom, but also how administering assessments may cause challenges.”

Learning through Play (Theme 3) is a consistent theme in current TK research. Described by Herota (2014) as “time for exploration [also referred to as “play”] without the expectation for children to produce something to demonstrate the acquisition of specific skills was a theme that resonated among teachers” reflected the research findings of O’Brien (2015) who asserted that “Play is being replaced by seat time. Children at this age have an inherent desire to move and explore. They learn through sensory play and often their fine motor skills are not up to the tasks expected of them” (p. 99). In spite of these assertions, Greene (2016) found that “Ms. [name removed] wanted to oversee procedures for children using toys, books and materials, so things were placed out of the children’s reach, or outside of child designated spaces, so it was clear that they were not accessible without adult supervision” (p. 189), but Greene (2016) also found that “Ms. [name removed] structured activities and materials in ways that maximized children’s independent access, and promoted shared cooperation amongst the students” (p. 194).

These findings coincide with the findings of this study. Inconsistent understanding of the need for children to interact with the learning environment based on interest (also referred to as “play”) resulted in findings that indicate that some children in California TK classrooms have the opportunities to explore, experiment, create, develop, and investigate independently while other children do not. Additionally, and as outlined in Chapter 2, current research indicates that self-control, self-monitoring, social-emotional skills, a love of learning, and academic development are best supported in learning environments where play is a critical instructional approach.

Theme 4, *Classroom Environment* which may be perceived as illuminating more tangible findings to evaluate, was routinely discussed in current TK research. From *bathroom availability*

“With 24 students ages four and five, and often no additional adult support in the classroom, restroom visits were a challenge for TK teachers” (Fong, 2016, p. 85) to *equipment challenges* such as “The removal of the water and sand tables, which are appropriate materials for 4-year old development, along with conflating behavior issues with social emotional development shows an overall lack of understanding of early childhood education by site administrators” (Henderson, 2016, p. 55) to *indoor spaces with designated areas* where “The centers were clearly defined to assist young children in social, emotional, moral, and cognitive development” (Facaros, 2017, p. 73). While the current study adds findings related to outdoor TK classroom spaces on local education agency campuses, it is clear that other researchers have provided findings related to respecting the physical needs of children in terms of availability (bathrooms), space to move, the elimination of physical barriers, open accessibility to learning tools, and the reduction of inappropriately sized and style (desks and chairs/tables and chairs) furniture in the learning environment.

Theme 5 *Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) and Developmentally Inappropriate Practices (DIP)* has been investigated by contemporary researchers. Silva (2016) found “a lack of exposure to fundamental learning theories [by TK teachers] (p. 134) and that “teachers desire clarity on expectations, assessments, and how to support transitional kindergarten students in a developmentally appropriate manner” (p. 143). Likewise, Fong (2016) found that “teachers were frustrated by how their TK students were expected to conform to a school day and structure designed for older children [DIP].” These and other findings discussed throughout this study support the findings of this research. Transitional kindergarten teachers desire to implement developmentally appropriate practices, but many do not have the knowledge and skills necessary to be successful, thereby potentially adversely impacting child outcomes.

Facaros, (2017) noted that “regardless of teachers’ depth of understanding of child development, they were passionate and enthusiastic supporters of the TK program and the opportunities and experiences that it affords” (p. 80). This finding is not correlated to the findings of this research work; however, it does elude to the wide discrepancy of teachers’ skills and knowledge regarding DAP and DIP. Being “enthusiastic” may be one element of teacher instructional quality, but it certainly has limited value when considering the detailed nuances of appropriate and inappropriate practices. One can be enthusiastic and fail to realize the inappropriateness of one’s teaching philosophy or teaching practices.

Correlating relevant research to Theme 6, *Administrative Decisions Regarding Transitional Kindergarten Implementation*, is the next focus. Ortiz (2018) revealed that “the message came through very clearly that teacher participants are in greater need of support both at their sites and from their districts” (p. 48). Like the findings of the current study, fellow researchers have found that decisions made by site and/or district administration can both positively and negatively impact program implementation and support or present barriers to developmentally appropriate practice. Silva (2016) found that “the qualitative data indicates that transitional kindergarten teachers desire support from districts in the form of instructional aides, assistance on assessments, clear teaching standards, and curriculum that aligns with the expectations of transitional kindergarten” (p. 130). Fong (2016) added to this discussion by sharing that a participant “reported having to ‘make things up’ due to the lack of direction [by administrators] for TK” (p. 59). The current study found that while a small portion of the sample of 23 teachers expressed contentment with the administrative support they were provided, the majority indicated frustration with site and district administrator knowledge about TK as

program, about the needs of young children, and with understanding developmentally appropriate practice.

Theme 7, *Professional Learning Experiences and Opportunities*, focused on a stratified population of participants who participated in state-funded transitional kindergarten professional learning. To my knowledge, no other scholarly research has focused on or provided insights about the outcomes of the both the in-person and online modules funded by the California legislature. As a reminder from Chapter 3, approximately, 9,000 TK professional learning sessions have been attended (this is a duplicated, rather than unduplicated count). Of the attendees to-date, approximately 4,500 (from a total population of approximately 295,000) were TK teachers, 1,800 were preschool teachers, and 500 were kindergarten teachers. The current study identified that 12 of 23 (52%) study participants were engaged in one or more sessions. While two participants indicated that these sessions were not particularly helpful to them, all others who participated in some or all of the sessions, perceived the trainings as necessary, valuable and crucial to their application of developmentally appropriate practice. This is significant moving forward in attempts to mitigate the rapid roll-out of TK. These professional learning opportunities, from the sampling in this study, could positively impact the instructional practices of many more TK teachers assigned to TK classrooms.

Like Theme 7, little research has included elements of Theme 8, *Teachers' Policy Concerns*; however, dissertation work by Herota (2014) indicted that “the latitude to design a transitional kindergarten program also led to ambiguity and lack of clarity” (p. 55) and “[site decision-makers] encountered a great deal of ambiguity resulting from the limited mandates and guidelines provided by the policy” (p. 52). Soria (2015) also identified such ambiguity when finding that “particularly notable were the divergent views regarding how the phase-in of the

new kindergarten start age went” (p. 51) and “all other principals felt that the process of phasing-in the new entry date over three years was a confusing component of the policy and, therefore, made it difficult to implement” (p. 52). Fong (2016) supported these claims when determining that “even though the teachers themselves stated they were unclear on the purpose of TK and reported that they did really know why it was created, when parents were unhappy with TK the teachers found a way to explain the benefits” (p. 50). Silva (2016), too, came to similar conclusions when asserting that “[The] lack of uniformity, training for teachers, and understanding of transitional kindergarten’s goals creates an educational issue that needs to be addressed” (p. 131). The conclusions of these researchers, Herota (2014), Soria (2015), Fong and Silva (2016) are overtly confirmed by the data findings discovered in this study.

While, for some readers, Theme 9, *Teacher Anecdotes*, may be perceptibly less significant, it is important to focus on the commitment of TK teachers to provide quality educational and social-emotional experiences for young children. They are, after all, the primary concern for all research activities related to transitional kindergarten. They, the children, who did not have a voice in legislatively mandated programming, are the recipients of program implementation decisions. How TK teachers perceive and interpret the support or lack thereof, from colleagues, administrators, and parents directly influences program implementation practices. Correlating this theme to Theme 2 (*Challenges and Successes*), Ortiz (2018) provided a relevant teacher anecdote: “Instead of saying this is a K–2 training they would say this is a TK–2 training. They would just add the little in there as if we were included” (p. 38). Teachers in the current study expressed this same frustration.

Limitations

The findings of my study have limitations worth considering. First, I offered to some participants the opportunity to engage in “member checking” whereby, “data or results are returned to participants to check for accuracy” (Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, & Walter, 2016, p. 1). However, Thomas (2016) indicated “there was little evidence that member checks improved research findings” (p. 1). The entirety of study interviews was recorded by audio and while member checks may have increased the trustworthiness of reflections and opinions of study participants, I do not, as Thomas (2016) indicated, believe it to be an essential strategy.

It should be made clear that I intentionally did not include site administrators, district staff, or other stakeholders in this study. Including these stakeholders may have provided additional background and deeper understanding of the problem. While versus coding was utilized to capture incongruities between teachers and administrators, administrators’ perspectives were not solicited. Time restraints, study size restraints, and study protocol limited the focus to teachers.

Stressing, then, that my study has been primarily concerned with teachers’ perspectives on preparation programs, teacher understanding of developmentally appropriate practice, and teacher self-reflection of program implementation, limitations abound. The parameters of the research project protocol did not allow for interactions with legislative decision-makers, tracking of student outcomes, and detailed tracking of teacher’s actionable responses to engagement in professional learning opportunities. Additionally, reflecting on attribute coding during the methodology phase, interview locations may have limited my data collection sources. Conducting all interviews in the classrooms of TK teachers could have provided additional observational details about the actual implementation of developmentally appropriate practice related to the physical learning environment. First hand observation of furniture placement and

size, observation of the inclusion or exclusion of instructional materials available for children to interact with, observation of playground spaces, observation of bathroom geography relative to the classroom, observation of “kid friendly” spaces supporting social-emotional development, observation and examination of curricular tools and assessment tools, observations of posted classroom schedule . . . these all would have significantly enhanced the data collection process and later analyses. This limitation is significant and should be considered for future study replication endeavors; however, some participants may be apprehensive or even resistant to this approach.

Qualtrics web-based software, as indicted in Chapter 3, was not utilized. It was my intent that Qualtrics would be utilized to create, distribute, and generate reports from the responses provided by participants on the demographic survey. Limited time to learn the program, prompted me to use simple Excel spreadsheets to record, sort, and analyze the data. This process was sufficient; however, I suspect that had I had a working knowledge of this software tool, data collection and analysis would have been simplified.

Intending to capture quantitative data, I had the potentiality of navigational misguidance in the research process. I requested that participants locate and share their teacher preparation program and all institute of higher education transcripts. While the transcripts would have provided a listing of completed coursework that could have provided a more exact accounting of the types of preparation received, not all participants were able to retrieve their transcripts. Some could speak directly to the content and outcomes of the courses, particularly early childhood education and child development courses.

Study participant group size also presented limitations to the study. While initially planning to interview 10–12 TK teachers, I found that many teachers were eager to participate,

and I had difficulty declining such interest. Of course, saturation played a part in this; however, my interest in giving TK teachers an avenue or a “voice” to communicate their experiences with TK was a worthy endeavor. This, as has been pointed out to me, is not the purpose of dissertation work. The 23 teachers who did participate were eager, felt empowered and recognized, and will be eager to participate in future studies. I will retain the knowledge of these expressions of participation enthusiasm as I continue to develop related research agendas.

I have not addressed the influences of socio-economic status, special education needs, dual language learning challenges, or the developmental outcomes of children based on the level of developmentally appropriate practices implemented by transitional kindergarten teachers. While not within the scope of study, this limitation did not allow for data related to the interconnectedness of teaching practices and consequences for children. Whether it be general education or sub-population reporting, conclusions could not be made about teacher effectiveness.

It is also possible, as an additional limitation, that individual personalities and experiences may have caused some bias in study results. Information and reflections provided by teachers who expressed satisfaction or dissatisfaction with administrators’ understanding of TK best practices, may have provided information that could not be corroborated with the study parameters. By the very nature of self-reflection, interpretation of experiences can vary widely from the original experience. Notably, the gender of all participants was female. Including other gender classifications could have enhanced the data collected and provided a wider perspective of experiences.

While defending data collection procedures, data analysis and interpretation activities, it is further my intent to add to the exceptionally limited scholarly research currently available.

Over the course of development of this study, limited research has been added and notably, much of this research appears to have been conducted within the limitations of dissertations. While valuable, dissertations have a narrow scope of purpose than what could be added by established and professional researchers. Dissertations completed prior to and during the development of this study, however, may be of interest to readers, stakeholders, and decision-makers. The topics of selected current dissertation work include findings related to TK professional development opportunities, district level implementation examples, impact of TK on grade 3 reading and mathematics, perceptions of TK by various stakeholders, social-emotional growth in TK, outcomes of TK for dual language learners, self-regulation of children in TK programs, teacher preparedness, integration of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), and autism spectrum disorder interventions in TK.

While significant findings have been suggested by these studies, investigations from highly qualified researchers would offer important impacts within the education field in California and nationwide. Providing confirmation and validation of this study and other dissertations will build a relevant and important knowledge base for educators, those who prepare educators, and for student outcomes in public education.

Implication of the Results for Practice, Policy, and Theory

Embedded in the opening remarks of this chapter, were four weighty policy-related propositions that must be considered when discussing the policy implications of these study results. They were:

- An urgent review of the impact of the perceived lack of thorough pre-legislative scrutiny regarding transitional kindergarten and the preparation of TK teachers and determination about how to now mitigate negative outcomes;
- An urgent need for researchers to conduct deep studies on the implementation practices and outcomes of children in California’s transitional kindergarten;
- An urgent need for California site-based administrators to enhance their knowledge of early childhood education; and
- An urgent need to ensure that those who are teaching or will be teaching children in transitional kindergarten programs have the research-based skills, knowledge, and disposition necessary.

While these four urgent needs could be immediately addressed by the California Legislature, the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, site administrators, local policy bodies (boards of education), and TK teachers themselves, additional responses to the findings in this study could be addressed by:

- Reviewing the level of participation by TK teachers and other credentialed educators in the TK professional learning modules developed by the California Preschool Instructional Network, supported by a reimbursement stipend program for the required twelve units of early childhood education and/or child development units through the 58 California Local Planning Councils;
- Reviewing “grandfathering” decisions made by local education agencies to ensure that what teachers have been given credit for, are indeed, credits that match legislative intent;

- Reviewing of the impact of moving some children from early childhood education programs funded by the state to local education agency programs (LEAs); and
- Studying the intended and unintended consequences of TK legislation.

Described narratively, implications of this study on teacher practice include the evidenced findings that some TK teachers do not understand fully what developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) should look like. This lack of understanding may cause overtly negative implications for children of approximately four years of age whose development is different from that of a kindergarten student who is approximately five years of age.

Interrelated implications must include discussion of what DAP should look like and the tools necessary to provide rich and meaningful classroom experiences for children. Responding to these implications will likely cost LEAs funding challenges as they will see the need to provide appropriate furniture, learning tools, curricular approaches, teacher training, and physical adjustments to both indoor and outdoor learning environments. Additionally, the costs for providing appropriate and research-based adult:child ratios, compliance with law focused on early childhood education (Title 5) and care (Title 22), and “marketing” the value of TK to parents and the wider community may impact LEA budgets.

An additional practice implication of the findings in this study are also related to educators; however, the educators discussed by participants were “instructional leaders” in positions of administration. While findings in this study indicated that a few teachers felt they worked with administrators (site principals) who fully understood early learning and DAP, and while some teachers indicated that though the site administrator did not show DAP understanding but did “support” the teacher by giving a sense of “free reign” to do as the teacher thought best, more teacher participants indicated that site administrators did not understand nor

had they been exposed to the tenets of early childhood education or child development, that they did not support teachers fiscally or administratively in their attempts to differentiate the kind of instructional practices often found in kindergarten or first grade, and actually placed barriers in the way of teachers to implement a developmentally appropriate program for children of approximately four years of age.

An implication regarding practice, then, includes paying attention to the professional learning needs of site and district administrators (as well as all other staff who interact with TK children). Site administrators, according to the reflections and perceptions of nearly one-half of participants, do not have the knowledge and skills to identify high-quality early learning practices to fully support TK teachers. While this study did not, as discussed in the Limitations section, intentionally include interviews with instructional leaders, reflection and anecdotal data collected from participants indicated that the need for professional learning is great amongst administrators. Teachers may gain the skills and knowledge necessary to implement DAP, but without administrative reinforcement, program quality may be compromised.

Prior to professional learning opportunities (which is defined by the California Department of Education (CDE) as learning experiences for established teachers) and different from professional development (defined as learning experiences for novice teachers), teachers complete coursework in an institute of higher education (IHE) preparation program. An implication that is currently being discussed and acted upon by IHE faculty and chancellor's offices throughout the state is a reassessment of coursework requirements considering TK. While I do not have specific information about the current status of this work, as a CDE employee, I am aware of this work. Likewise, implications of this and other research highlights the need for the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CCTC) to review, plan for, and be part of the

discussion regarding modifications in the credentialing system. This could include changes in credential requirements, changes in the types of credentials authorized, and/or changes that will impact the course content planning of IHEs.

Theoretical implications are difficult to identify as there are, currently, no scholarly TK theories to turn to. There are theories on early childhood education related to preschool (discussed in Chapter 2) and home settings. There are theories on target versus continuum approaches (also discussed in Chapter 2). There are theories on *transitioning to* kindergarten which were unrelated to the current study, but there are no theories regarding the implementation of early childhood education practices in local education settings for children of approximately four years of age. While theories regarding the development of children abound, to my knowledge studies, other than dissertation work discussed in this chapter, do not yet exist.

This gap in research theory must be mitigated in order to ensure that outcomes for California's children will be on an improved trajectory of understanding and implementation. The magnitude of this gap has been reported in dissertation and masters level thesis work following the creation of TK. These works have provided a first level response to the information gap and will, hopefully, become the basis to move researchers toward further investigation.

The findings of this study are context-bound and peculiar to the participants involved. Unfortunately, the implications discussed are not generalizable as in quantitative research. Responding to and transferring what was learned in this and other doctoral studies would lead to advanced knowledge and the elimination of an obvious research gap and about early childhood education in LEA settings. While it is possible that differing results may be found, it is more likely that the essence of these findings will be replicated and validated thus improving the

prospect that decision-makers will act on the implications and recommendations provided here and in the works of my colleagues.

Lastly, the participants may have stated the implications of this study best by vocalizing the following opinions of TK legislation: “We were tossed into a classroom.” “There [are] kids all over!” “Oh, you mean I’m an interior decorator?” “I’m herding cats.” “nature instead of woodchips and grass.” “They just want dumbed down kindergarten.” “The math [curriculum] is garbage.” “I just wish administrators would have more balls.” These are a sampling of succinct, direct, candid, and explicit phraseology that communicate, in a vernacular manner, the implications of TK implementation.

Recommendations for Further Research

As suggested in the previous section, this study was designed to be replicated, expanded, extended, strengthened and/or altered to create new opportunities for research. Additionally, the reader may recall that the content of Chapter 2 presented a hybrid of historical, conceptual, intersticed, and methodological review. Historically, it was noted, there is little LEA TK research (Fong, 2016; Silva, 2016) due wholly to the novelty of transitional kindergarten.

To that end and before presenting recommendations for research topics, a methodological approach is recommended. Considering that social science research protocol, including educational research, is a complicated task and that involves both human beings and concrete data sets, Plowright’s (2013) assertion in an article on this topic is notable: “Most methodology publications still tend to reinforce a polarised (sic) understanding of methodologies with a distinctions between qualitative and quantitative [methods]. It is legitimate to use methods drawn from both approaches and to mix these in the same study” (p. 1).

After defining the differences between and the qualities of both quantitative and qualitative research protocol and purpose, Ayiro (2012) made an argument for mixed methodological approaches in education research. “When you use several methods, you can use the strengths of [each] and minimize the weaknesses. A mixed method approach of gathering and evaluation can increase the validity and accuracy of the information” (p. 491). Ayiro (2012) followed up on this assertion with another: “The use of quantitative and qualitative approaches in combination provides a better understanding of research problems than either approach alone” (p. 492). This also matches Kemp-Graham’s (2017) thinking when determining that “a combined approach would allow me to better understand [the problem]. Both data collection and analysis would be weighted equally. Mixed methods [could provide] triangulation . . . findings would be strengthened by collecting and analyzing both [types] data” (p. 4). It is with the premise that mixed methodology may yield wider and more accurate results than using a single methodology, that I encourage researchers to consider the following recommendations for future research efforts.

Therefore, the following recommendations for future research are made and contain a level of amalgamation from current dissertations focused on TK. It is recommended that research efforts include investigations related to inequity in teacher quality in TK classrooms. Highly prepared teachers, with deep understanding of what is developmentally appropriate as well as teachers who do not have this knowledge, are in classrooms impacting thousands of children across the state. Researchers can measure teacher effectiveness, study the elements that define effectiveness, and measure student outcomes based on this effectiveness. Conversely, researchers could study teachers who are determined not to be effective, based on numerous factors including student outcomes.

Another avenue for further study would be research regarding student outcomes from the onset of TK through, at least, third grade. While studies investigating the trends of student outcomes will surely be highly complex (and may therefore be best investigated with mixed research methodology), it is necessary to look at and somehow separate the myriad impacts and focus on all children being served by highly qualified teachers who understand the developmental stages and needs of children and who can provide instructional guidance and learning environments that promote the highest levels of proficiency possible for each child.

It is important and relevant to investigate whether the policy practices of the California legislative body are sufficiently studied prior to legislative action. The practice of grandfather/mothering (a clause in legislation that allows for previous expectations to exist while new expectations are enforced for incoming teachers) is a major issue that should be studied, as is the issue of concern raised by study participants regarding inequitable implementation of developmentally appropriate practice in TK and other early childhood and early elementary settings.

This study offers overt and suggestive evidence for researchers to probe deeply and widely into the “teacher voice,” the voices impacted by legislation of which they were not a part. If the conclusions of this study are confirmed, there will also be a case for refocusing on TK and other programs for children of approximately four years of age.

Conclusion

It has been my intent to study, discuss, and consider two primary questions. To understand the impact, consequences, and outcomes of the varied complexities of early education and general education teacher preparation, permit and certification requirements, theoretical knowledge, professional dispositions, and implementation practices, it has been crucial to offer

TK teachers opportunities to provide direct and meaningful input. The data revealed legislative action consequences, preparation program results, and program implementation strengths and challenges. Two research questions focused this study:

1. How do California local education agency educators assigned to teach in transitional kindergarten classrooms describe the content, quality, and quantity of early childhood education and child development coursework in pre-service K–8 degree preparation programs and credential acquirement?

To understand LEA teacher confidence in implementing research-based developmentally appropriate practices, widely implemented by the non-LEA ECE workforce, a second key research question was addressed:

2. How do California local education agency educators assigned to teach in transitional kindergarten classrooms describe their experiences implementing research-based early childhood education developmentally appropriate practices in a TK classroom?

Interview data collected, sorted, categorized, themed, and analyzed suggest that most teachers currently assigned to transitional kindergarten classrooms in California do not feel they were effectively prepared to teach and more specifically, do not feel they were adequately prepared to teach children of approximately four years of age. While those few who had early childhood education backgrounds, did feel prepared, much of this preparation was experiential rather than academic.

Interview data also suggested that, in response to the Research Question #2, that many TK teachers do not have a clear and articulatable understanding of developmentally appropriate practice (DAP). Some teachers have general understandings about such practices but were not able to bring this understanding to the level of quality needed by the children before them. Some,

indeed, did discuss and show evidence of high levels of DAP quality understanding and implementation, however, they appeared to be the minority. This does not in any way suggest the dedication, devotion, and passion of all teachers in the study. Findings, straightforwardly, point to the need for TK teachers to have the knowledge and skills of early childhood educator best practices.

A component of this conclusion is the acknowledgement of unintended consequences. Should this research and other TK-specific research be ignored, developmentally inappropriate practice, continued disagreements about program implementation, and questionable student outcomes will be perpetuated.

I dedicated this work to people in my life who, during the development of this research study, confronted serious illness and medical challenges, passed away, were born, and in some way reminded me of the importance of my own life. I further dedicated this work to those many people who have been supporters, “cheerleaders,” and champions of my intent to improve educational outcomes for children. I also dedicated this study to those who have previously and successfully climbed the Ivory Tower and to those whose work, like mine, was focused on the (still) new phenomenon of transitional kindergarten.

Just as importantly, and maybe more so, I dedicated this study to my own four children and to all the other children who have come across my life’s path. The need to improve what we are doing for their sake’s is tremendous. What little I have done here will, hopefully, add to the knowledge currently being provided by other doctoral candidates to accomplish the goal of improving teacher skills and ensuring critical outcomes for children.

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Appendix A: Qualtrics Participant Demographic Survey

“A Qualitative Phenomenological Investigation of Self-Reported Early Childhood Education Preparation”

Q1 My full name is:

Q2 I currently teach transitional kindergarten learners in California Superintendent:

- Region 1: Del Norte, Humboldt, Lake, Mendocino, Sonoma (1)
- Region 2: Butte, Glenn, Lassen, Modoc, Plumas, Shasta, Siskiyou, Tehama, Trinity (2)
- Region 3: Alpine, Colusa, El Dorado, Nevada, Placer, Sacramento, Sierra, Sutter, Yolo, Yuba (3)
- Region 4: Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, Napa, San Francisco, San Mateo, Solano (4)
- Region 5: Monterey, San Benito, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz (5)
- Region 6: Amador, Calaveras, San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Tuolumne (6)
- Region 7: Fresno, Kings, Madera, Mariposa, Merced, Tulare (7)
- Region 8: Kern, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, Ventura (8)
- Region 9: Imperial, Orange, San Diego (9)
- Region 10: Inyo, Mono, Riverside, San Bernardino (10)
- Region 11: Los Angeles (11)

Q3 I have been assigned to teach transitional kindergarten learners for:

- two to four school years (1)
- five to seven school years (2)
- more than seven years (3)

Q4 I currently teach TK in a:

- Single grade classroom (TK students only) (1)
- TK/K combination classroom (2)
- TK/K/1 combination classroom (3)

Other (4) Q5 Degrees earned:

- Bachelors in Education Field (1)
- Bachelors in Non-Education Field (2)
- Masters in Education Field (3)
- Masters in Non-Education Field (4)
- Doctorate in Education Field (5)
- Doctorate in Non-Education Field (6)

Q6 The name of the institution(s) (college or university) that I attended:

Q7 I hold the following permits and/or credentials (please mark all that apply):

- Multiple Subject / California Prepared (1)
- Multiple Subject / Out of State Prepared (2)
- Multiple Subject / Out of U.S. Prepared (3)
- Multiple Subject / Peace Corps Experience (4)

- Multiple Subject / Private School Experience (5)
- Child Development Assistant Permit (6)
- Child Development Associate Teacher Permit (7)
- Child Development Teacher Permit (8)
- Child Development Master Teacher Permit (9)
- Child Development Site Supervisor Permit (10)
- Child Development Program Director Permit (11)
- Child Development Permit with School Age Emphasis Authorization (12)
- Designated Subject Teaching Credential (13)
- Administrative Services Credential (14)
- Pupil Personnel Services Credential (15)
- Speech Services Credential (16)
- Special Education Credential (17)
- Substitute Teacher Permit (18)

Q8 In the school years 2017–18, 2018–19, 2019–20 I see myself possibly:

- teaching transitional kindergarten (1)
- teaching in another early elementary grade level (K–3) (2)
- teaching in fourth grade or above (3)
- leaving education for another profession (4)
- retiring (5)
- other (6)

Appendix B: Interview Protocol, Range of Topics, and Interview Question Guide

Protocol. Interview protocol, or the system of guidelines used in discussions with study participants, is outlined here to ensure that general questioning is consistent with all participants. Such consistency will provide depth of topic investigation while simultaneously considering and encouraging spontaneity. Elucidating and illuminating areas of participant understanding of the transitional kindergarten phenomenon will provide relevance and validity for interested stakeholders and fellow researchers.

Participants will be asked to voluntarily bring preparation program transcripts to the interview. This will not be a requirement, but rather a suggestion so that together we can review the titles of coursework to collaboratively determine the level to which the IHE infused early childhood education and/or child development study in the preparation program. If preferred, grades earned can be blocked by the participant. If the participant prefers to not share transcripts, I will bring a current catalog listing of the program coursework as it is presented online.

Each discussion will be divided into six sections: introductions, rapport building, overview of research project, exploration of topic-based questions and open dialogue, thank you for participation, and closing. It is anticipated that each interview discussion will be 45–60 minutes in duration.

Introductions. Using common courtesy protocol, I will introduce myself, share my professional employment background, general areas of professional interest, and thank the participant for making time available to contribute to this study. I will ask the participant to share a similar introduction and request approval for audio taping of the discussion.

Rapport building. In order to build trust, encourage open dialogue, free flow of sharing of in-depth topic responses, and build a positive attitude toward the upcoming topic-based

exploration of the participant's experience with transitional kindergarten preparation and implementation, rapport building will be an important initial conversation step. It will be at this time that I request that the participant sign a form indicating the willingness (consent) to participate in the study.

Overview of Research Project. To ensure that the participant understands the purpose of the study, the research questions will be provided verbally and in writing. How do California local education agency educators assigned to teach in transitional kindergarten classrooms describe the content, quality, and quantity of early childhood education and child development coursework in pre-service K–8 degree preparation programs and credential acquirement and how do California local education agency educators assigned to teach in transitional kindergarten classrooms describe their experiences implementing research-based early childhood education developmentally appropriate practices in a TK classroom?

A brief background will be offered to the participant regarding transitional kindergarten legislation, stated legislative intent, and demographics of TK in California including the (most current) number of young learners as well as teachers.

Exploration of topic-based questions and open dialogue. The following is a structured list of topics and topic-related questions that will be followed as closely as possible during each interview in order to ensure interview consistency, depth in topic development, and range of four content-based prompting areas that will elicit direct correlation to the research questions.

Professional preparation reflection.

- I see from the online survey that you attended (name of IHE) and earned your (degree title) in (title of major area of study). Tell me about your experiences there.

- While in the (teacher preparation program name) at (name of IHE), which coursework do you remember most and why?
- Think back to (or look at) your program transcripts. Which courses can you identify that may or did have an early childhood education or child development focus? How can we tell? Do you remember participating in these courses?
- Reflect on graduation from (name of IHE). What do recall learning about early childhood education or child development?
- Upon leaving (name of IHE) did you feel you were prepared to effectively and successfully implement early childhood education developmentally appropriate practices? How so?
- Knowing now that you are teaching TK, is there anything you wish would have been different in your preparation program?
- Knowing now that your teaching credential was issued based on your ability to teach K–(insert grade) and not TK specifically, reflect on what you believe would have been most helpful in preparing you to teach TK.

Experience with transitional kindergarten program implementation.

- I see from the online survey that you have been teaching transitional kindergarten for (number of years). How did it come about that you were first assigned to teach TK?
- What do you see as the similarities and/or differences between kindergarten and transitional kindergarten?

- What grade(s) did you teach before TK? Do you believe there was any impact on your ability to teach TK based on these other grade level experiences?
- According to the online survey, you (do/do not) have (number) TK teaching colleagues. How do you think this affects your practice?
- What kind of in-service, professional development, professional learning, conference, webinars, etc. have you participated in related specifically to teaching TK?
- How do you define the similarities and differences between preschool and TK?

Classroom practices.

- What do you understand “developmentally appropriate practice” to be”?
- How do you apply DAP in the learning environment and with young learners currently assigned to you?
- How do you know if you are successfully preparing your students for Kindergarten and beyond?
- Do you use published curricular tools? If so, did you participate in the selection of these tools?
- Reflect back to your first year of teaching TK? What are you doing differently now and what instigated this(these) change(s)?

Next steps.

- Many teachers, during the course of a school year, often reflect and even make written notes about how they want to modify the learning environment, instructional practices, classroom organization, and best practices that may

improve student outcomes in the future. What do you see as your next steps toward enhancing your TK implementation skills and knowledge?

Thank you for participation. To ensure that each participant feels valued for openly sharing their TK experiences, I will formally thank them for their participation, time, insights, and contribution to this study. Participants will be invited to offer additional comments, reflections, or questions. Additionally, a follow-up thank you card and suggesting that I can make the dissertation available to them when complete will be offered.

Closing. Confirming that the participant has my contact information and is free to contact me with any questions, suggestions, additional reflections, and comments will provide a closing to the interview protocol.

Appendix C: Statement of Original Work

The Concordia University Doctor of Education Program is a collaborative community of scholar-practitioners, who seek to transform society by pursuing ethically informed, rigorously researched, inquiry-based projects that benefit professional, institutional, and local educational contexts. Each member of the community affirms throughout their program of study, adherence to the principles and standards outlined in the Concordia University Academic Integrity Policy. This policy states the following:

Statement of academic integrity.

As a member of the Concordia University community, I will neither engage in fraudulent or unauthorized behaviors in the presentation and completion of my work, nor will I provide unauthorized assistance to others.

Explanations:

What does “fraudulent” mean?

“Fraudulent” work is any material submitted for evaluation that is falsely or improperly presented as one’s own. This includes, but is not limited to texts, graphics and other multi-media files appropriated from any source, including another individual, that are intentionally presented as all or part of a candidate’s final work without full and complete documentation.

What is “unauthorized” assistance?

“Unauthorized assistance” refers to any support candidates solicit in the completion of their work, that has not been either explicitly specified as appropriate by the instructor, or any assistance that is understood in the class context as inappropriate. This can include, but is not limited to:

- Use of unauthorized notes or another’s work during an online test
- Use of unauthorized notes or personal assistance in an online exam setting
- Inappropriate collaboration in preparation and/or completion of a project
- Unauthorized solicitation of professional resources for the completion of the work.

I attest that:

1. I have read, understood, and complied with all aspects of the Concordia University–Portland Academic Integrity Policy during the development and writing of this dissertation.
2. Where information and/or materials from outside sources has been used in the production of this dissertation, all information and/or materials from outside sources has been properly referenced and all permissions required for use of the information and/or materials have been obtained, in accordance with research standards outlined in the Publication Manual of The American Psychological Association.

Digital Signature

Elizabeth A. Golchert

Name (Typed)

Elizabeth A. Golchert